

THE
EVOLUTION OF EPISCOPACY
AND
ORGANIC METHODISM.

BY

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TO
THE HONORED BISHOPS
OF THE
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
IN
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
THIS WORK IS
Respectfully Dedicated.

P R E F A C E.

FROM the seed is evolved the plant, from the germ is evolved the complex organism, and from simple beginnings have been evolved great ecclesiastical organizations.

Some of these ecclesiastical evolutions invite our investigation. In this study of history we will consider the evolution of the later episcopacy from the simple forms of the early Christian Church, the modification of views in the Church of England after the Protestant Reformation, the change of Wesley's views in regard to Church government, the gradual evolution of organic Methodism, the growth of Methodism in America, the validity of Methodist ordinations, and the propriety and legitimacy of the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

In treating the latter point, we will take a view of the ecclesiastical conditions existing in

America after the Revolutionary War, and give a sketch of the organization of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

The evolution of organic Methodism is one of the marvelous facts of modern times, and is worthy the study of the general reader as well as of the ecclesiastical student, and one of the most striking features of this organism is its system of supervision.

The episcopacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church is an important part of its polity. It is therefore necessary that it be properly understood.

As the episcopate is defined the polity of the denomination will be molded, and the regard of those who are not members will depend largely upon their having, in some measure, a correct view of this great office.

From 1784, when the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America was organized, there have been a number of discussions of great interest concerning this high office, but the generation familiar with the old controversies has passed away, and a new generation, not familiar with those discussions

and the opinions of the founders of the Church, has come upon the stage of action.

That the results of those controversies should not be lost sight of, and that the new generation should understand the status of the episcopate in the Methodist Episcopal Church, it has been deemed wise to collate the views of the founders of the Church, and to formulate the doctrine of the episcopacy as held by the representative men and the councils of the Methodist Episcopal Church from 1784 to 1884, thus covering the first century of the history of the organization.

As the founders of the Methodist Episcopal Church claimed that their episcopacy was in harmony with the episcopate of the early Christian Church in New Testament times, the work will open with a brief presentation of the nature of the bishopric in that period of the Church.

As Methodism sprang from the Church of England, a portion of the work will be devoted to views of the episcopacy as held in that body.

As the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., of Oxford University, was the founder of Methodism and

was looked upon as the head of Methodism in America, a summary of his opinions will very properly have a place.

In this inquiry the effort will be to bring forth things both "new and old;" for the old may be as valuable as the new, and the new and the old together may add to each other's force. In stating facts as recorded by others, and in citing opinions, we will, in many instances, prefer to quote the very words rather than to give a digest in our own language. In this way the reader will not only have the fact, but, with the verbatim quotation before him, will be better able to form his own judgment as to the force of the citation.

The history involved touches various Churches in Europe and America, and may, therefore, interest various classes of readers.

T. B. NEELY.

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THE EPISCOPACY OF METHODISM.

CHAPTER I.

THE BISHOPRIC IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

THE question of the bishopric in the early Christian Church is largely a question as to the relative status of bishops and presbyters. Were they the same, or different? If they were different, what was the nature of that difference? It is, therefore, at the beginning, a matter of definition, and, consequently, a brief reference to derivation and definition will not be out of place.

The Greek *ἐπίσκοπος*, *episkopos* (Latin *episcopus*), meaning an overseer or superintendent, is from *ἐπισκοπέω*, *episkopeo*, to look upon, to inspect, or watch over, and this is compounded from *ἐπι*, *epi*, upon, and *σκοπέω*, *skopeo*, to look. From *episcopus* comes the Anglo-Saxon *biscop*, and, so, our English word bishop.

The word presbyter is from the Greek *πρεσβύτερος*, *presbuteros*, which means elder, or older. In ecclesiastical usage, therefore, the word elder, which is de-

rived from the Anglo-Saxon, and the word presbyter, which comes from the Greek, mean the same thing. From the literal meaning of the words it must appear that one might be a *πρεσβύτερος*, or presbyter, and an *ἐπίσκοπος*, or bishop, at the same time. That is to say, one might be an elder and, at the same time, an overseer. Literally, one might be an older person and at the same time be a superintendent, having the oversight of something.

The question, however, is as to the ecclesiastical, or, at this particular moment, the New Testament, use of the terms. The elders were originally what the word primarily meant — namely, the older persons; but afterward the word was technically applied to those who were elevated to the position of dignity formerly occupied by those of advanced years, or because of their headship of families.

The Rev. Edwin Hatch, M.A., in the Bampton Lectures of 1880, traces the gradual change of application in a very ingenious manner. He says: "The patriarchal state of society, in which families lived apart, and the head of the family was its administrator and judge, was succeeded in many parts of the world by the communal system, in which the government of an aggregation of families was in the hands of a council of heads of families—the elders of the commune. And just as the patriarchal system survived through many modifications of social circumstances as an underlying theory of domestic govern-

ment which has not wholly passed away even from modern society, so the communal system survived through many varieties of political organization as a system of local administration.

“It is found, for example, on the banks of the Nile: long after Egypt had been so far Hellenized that official documents were drawn up in Greek, we find from an extant papyrus that the presence of the elder of a village is necessary to the validity of an administrative act. It is found also in Palestine, and its presence there had so important a bearing upon the early organization of the Christian Churches as to render some account of it a necessary preliminary to the further consideration of that organization. It is recognized both in the Mosaic legislation and throughout the Old Testament history. The elders of those early times were probably like the sheykhs who have continued to the present day both among the Bedouins of the desert and in the settled villages of the Arabian peninsula. Their tenure of office rested rather upon the general consent than upon formal appointment, and the limits of their authority were but loosely defined. But in the interval between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New, a more definite form seems to have been given to this primitive institution. It may be gathered from the Talmud that out of the elders or chief men of every community a certain number had come to be officially recognized, and that

definite rules were laid down for their action. 'Side by side with the synagogue of a town, but distinct from it, was the *συνέδριον*, or local court. The former was the general assembly or 'congregation' of the people; the latter was the 'seat' of the elders. The two institutions were so far in harmony with one another that the meetings of the local court were held in the synagogue, and that in the meetings of the synagogue for its own proper purposes the elders of the local courts had seats of honor, the *πρωτοκαθεδρίας*, which our Lord describes the Pharisees as coveting: and hence the word synagogue is sometimes used where the word synedrion would be more exact: but the distinction between the two is clearly established, and is of great importance.

"So firm was the hold which this system obtained upon the Jews that they carried it with them into the countries of the dispersion. . . It seems certain upon the evidence that in these communities, to which in the first instance the Apostles naturally addressed themselves, there existed a governing body of elders whose functions were partly administrative and partly disciplinary. Consequently, when the majority of the members of a Jewish community were convinced that Jesus was the Christ, there was nothing to interrupt the current of their former common life. There was no need for secession, for schism, for a change in the organization. There is no trace of a break in the continuity: and there is con-

sequently a strong presumption, which subsequent history confirms, that the officers who continued to bear the same names in the same community exercised functions closely analogous to those which they exercised before; in other words, that the elders of the Jewish community which had become Christian were, like the elders of the Jewish communities which remained Jewish, officers of administration and of discipline.” *

As the first Christians were Jews, and hence were familiar with the forms of the synagogue worship and government, it was quite natural that the primary idea of Christian ecclesiasticism would grow out of, or at least bear some similarity to, the customs of Judaism or of the Jewish synagogue; and, therefore, as in the synagogue government there were elders, it was to be expected that the same people would have elders when they were formed into Christian churches.

Mr. Hatch undertakes also to show that the origin of the presbyterate “in those communities of which the members were Gentiles is equally natural, though rather more complex.” † He maintains, first, “that government by a council or committee was all but universal in the organizations with which Christianity came into contact.”

* *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches*, by Edwin Hatch, M.A., Vice-Principal of St. Mary Hall and Grinfield Lecturer in the Septuagint, Oxford. Second Edition Revised, London, 1882, pp. 56-62.

† *Ibid.*, p. 62.

“Every municipality of the empire was managed by its curia or senate. Every one of the associations, political or religious, with which the empire swarmed had its committee of officers. It was, therefore, antecedently probable, even apart from Jewish influence, that when the Gentiles who had embraced Christianity began to be sufficiently numerous in a city to require some kind of organization, that organization should take the prevailing form. The names of the governing body varied, but they all imply presidency or government, and they are always used in the plural.” *

Then he undertakes to account for “the fact that the members of such council or committee were known by a name which implies seniority.” He finds “the idea of respect for seniority in many places and in many forms. So strong was this idea that the terms which were relative to it were often used as terms of respect without reference to age. In the philosophical schools the professor was sometimes called *ὁ πρεσβύτερος*. In the ascetic communities of Egypt and Palestine respect for seniority was strongly marked, not only in the common usages of life, but also and especially in the assemblies, where the members sat in ranks, the younger beneath the elder, and where it was the task of the eldest and most experienced to discourse about divine things. There was thus an antecedent probability, apart from

* Hatch: *Organization of the Early Christian Churches*, pp. 62, 63.

Jewish influence, not only that the Christian communities, when organized, would be governed by a council, but also that in the appointment of the members of such a council seniority would be a prime qualification. And this we find to have been the fact in the case. Out of the several names which the members of the Christian councils bore, one ultimately survived the rest: they continue to be known to modern times as ‘presbyters.’ ” *

The fact, however, that the apostles were Jews and that the early Christian churches were made up largely from Jewish converts would be sufficient of itself to account for the creation or continuance of the eldership. We find that the early Christian Church had its elders, without much if any delay. Thus we read in Acts xi, 30, of the elders of the church in Jerusalem, and in Acts xiv, 23, we read of Paul and Barnabas appointing “elders in every church.”

Mr. Hatch also undertakes to show that the idea and name of the episcopate came from facts and conditions which existed outside of the Christian Church. He shows that during the first centuries of the Christian era there was a common tendency toward the formation of associations. The most important were religious associations and associations for the purpose of almsgiving, and Hatch remarks that “it is clear from the nature of the case that in

* Hatch: *Organization of the Early Christian Churches*, pp. 63-65.

communities which grew up under such circumstances, and in which the eleemosynary element was so prominent, the officer of administration and finance must have had an important place." He further observes that "if we turn to the contemporary non-Christian associations of Asia Minor and Syria—to the nearest neighbors, that is to say, of the Christian organizations—we find that the officers of administration and finance were chiefly known by one or other of two names, not far distant from one another in either form or meaning. The one was *ἐπιμελητής*, which has this additional interest, that it was the designation of the chief officers of the Essenes: the other was the name which became so strongly impressed on the officers of the Christian societies as to have held its place until modern times, and which in almost all countries of both East and West has preserved its form through all the vicissitudes of its meaning—in the Greek *ἐπίσκοπος*, the English *bishop*. There is this further point to be noted in reference to these names, that they were used not only in private associations but also in municipalities: and that they were applied not only to permanent or quasi-permanent officers, but also to the governing body, or a committee of the governing body, when intrusted with administration of funds for any special purpose.

"Now, in the Christian communities there appears to have been from the very early times a body of officers: it must be inferred from the identity of the

names which were employed that those officers were in relation to the Christian communities what the senate was in relation to a municipality, and what the committee was in reference to an association. They were known collectively by a name which is common in both relations, that of *ordo*; they were known individually as well as collectively by a name which was common to the members of the Jewish *συνέδρια* and to the members of the Greek *γερονσίαι* of Asia Minor—that of *πρεσβύτεροι*: they were also known—for I shall here assume what the weight of evidence has rendered practically indisputable—by the name *ἐπίσκοποι*. In their general capacity as a governing body they were known by names which were in current use for a governing body: in their special capacity as administrators of Church funds they were known by a name which was in current use for such administrators.”*

Here is the opinion of this scholar, who has lately made the question a special study, that the *πρεσβύτεροι*, or presbyters, and the *ἐπίσκοποι*, or bishops, in the early Christian Church were the same persons, the one name referring to one thing and the other referring to another. That presbyters and bishops were not two different orders, but different names for the same order, he affirms the “weight of evidence has rendered practically indisputable,” and in a foot-note he says: “The admissions of both mediæval and modern writers

* Hatch: *Organization of the Early Christian Churches*, pp. 36-39.

of almost all schools of theological opinion have practically removed this from the list of disputed questions."

That in the early Christian Church the words presbyter and bishop were titles given to the same men and to the same clerical order is admitted by the best authorities.

"In the New Testament the ordinary office bearers in the Christian community have a variety of designations. They are called *προϊσταμένοι, πρεσβύτεροι, ἐπίσκοποι, ποιμένες*, and *ἡγούμενοι*; but all these names are used evidently to express the same kind of officers, for they are continually used interchangeably the one for the other.

"The identity of the terms bishop and presbyter within the apostolic Church is now so universally admitted by scholars that the sole question really is, When did bishops begin to exist as separate and superior officers? and the dispute becomes one of historical facts rather than dogmatic theories." *

Pope says: "The terms employed to denote the ordinary spiritual office-bearers of the Christian community are in their English equivalents presbyters or elders, and bishops or overseers or superintendents. These, however, constitute one order in the New Testament."†

* *Ency. Brit.*, Ninth Edition, art. "Christianity."

† Pope's *Systematic Theology*, vol. iii, p. 342.

Archdeacon Farrar declares that "the distinction between 'bishop' and 'presbyter'" "is not found in the New Testament." *

Dean Stanley says: "It is certain that throughout the first century and for the first years of the second—that is, through the latter chapters of the Acts, the Apostolical Epistles, and the writings of Clement and Hermas—bishop and presbyter were convertible terms." †

Again, says Stanley: "In the first age there was no such marked distinction as we now find between the different orders of the clergy. It was only by slow degrees that the name bishop became appropriated to one chief pastor raised high in rank and station above the mass of the clergy." ‡

Turning from the testimony of the English scholars, we may add that of a distinguished prelate of the "Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America." The Right Rev. H. U. Onderdonk, D.D., Bishop of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, makes this admission: "The name 'bishop' which now designates the highest grade of the ministry, is not appropriated to this office in Scripture. That name is given to the middle order, or presbyters; and all that we read in the New Testament concerning 'Bishops' (including, of course, the words 'overseers' and 'oversight,' which have the same

* Farrar: *Early Days of Christianity*, Appendix xiv.

† Stanley's *Christian Institutions*, p. 171.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

derivation,) is to be regarded as pertaining to the middle grade.” *

The confession of episcopal authorities like Hatch, Stanley, and Farrar, of the Church of England, and Bishop Onderdonk, of the Protestant Episcopal Church, is of very great value, and for the purposes of this inquiry may be held to be worth much more as evidence than the testimony of anti-episcopal scholars, though the declarations of scholars of non-episcopal denominations is equally clear, and, as to the thoroughness of scholarship, equally strong. That in churches where some claim that bishops are of higher clerical order than presbyters the leading scholars admit that, in New Testament times, bishops and presbyters were the same order stamps their confession with the presumption of conclusiveness.

The early Christian fathers show the original identity of bishops and presbyters as to ministerial order.

Irenæus, who died about A. D. 202, uses the words bishop and presbyter interchangeably. Thus he speaks of Polycarp as a bishop, and, in another place, as an apostolical presbyter, ἀποστολικὸς πρεσβύτερος.

Justin Martyr, the Christian philosopher who suffered martyrdom, A. D. 165, does not speak of bishops, but, referring to the service in the churches, make mention of deacons, and of the president of the brethren (προεστὼς τῶν ἀδελφῶν), who was evidently nothing more than the officiating presbyter.

* Bishop Onderdonk's *Episcopacy Tested by Scripture*, p. 12.

Polycarp, who wrote about A. D. 140, refers to two orders only. In his Epistle to the Philippians this Bishop of Smyrna opens with the words: "Polycarp, and the presbyters with him," or, as it is also rendered "Polycarp, and those who with him are presbyters." * He does not even mention the word bishop, but uses the words presbyters and deacons, and exhorts the Philippians to be "subject to the presbyters and deacons," showing that they were the governing bodies. If there had been a bishop of superior order at Philippi, doubtless Polycarp would have addressed or referred to him, and the inference, therefore, must be that there was no higher order than that of the presbyters, and it will be remembered that Paul in his salutation to the church at Philippi addresses the bishops and deacons, showing that bishops and presbyters were the same order.

Clement of Rome, who wrote about A. D. 96, recognizes, in his Epistles to the Corinthians, only two orders, under the titles of bishops and deacons. He says the apostles "appointed the first-fruits [of their labors], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterward believe" (First Epistle of Clement, chap. xlii); and in another place (chap. xlv) he uses the title presbyters in reference to those in the episcopate, thus showing the identity of presbyters and bishops.

The recently discovered Greek manuscript *The*

* Clark's Edinburgh Edition of the *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 69.

Teaching of the Apostles also reveals that in the early days of the Christian Church there was no clerical order higher than the eldership. This is important evidence, for the Didache, or Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles, belongs to a very early period. The best critics agree that it was of Jewish origin and that Palestine was the place of its composition, that it is older than the Shepherd of Hermas, older than the Epistle of Barnabas, and that it was in all probability known to and used by Justin Martyr and Ignatius, which makes it prior to A. D. 115, which the best critics fix as the time of the death of Ignatius.* Lightfoot puts it within from A. D. 80 to A. D. 110. Schaff puts it not later than between A. D. 90 and A. D. 100. Funk assigns it to the last quarter of the first century, and Sabatier dates it as early as A. D. 50, before St. Paul's great missionary journeys were undertaken, while the first editor, Bryennios, placed it from A. D. 120 to A. D. 160, and Harnack puts it in the period between A. D. 135 and A. D. 165.† But whether we accept the earliest date assigned by these critics or one of the later ones, this document is of great antiquity, and has great weight in determining the matter under investigation, and it shows that in those early days there was no ministerial order higher than the eldership.

* *Treatise on the Teaching of the Apostles*, by Dr. Charles Taylor, Master of St. John's College, Cambridge, England.

† Lightfoot on Philippians. Eighth Edition, London, 1885, p. 349.

The Greek address of the "Teaching" is the *Teaching of the Lord, through the Twelve Apostles, to the Nations*. The fifteenth chapter opens with the words: "Now appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord," *Χειροτονήσατε οὖν ἑαυτοῖς ἐπισκόπους καὶ διακόνους ἀξίους τοῦ Κυρίου.*" This shows that at the time the Teaching was written the Church did not know more than two orders, and that the *ἐπίσκοποι*, or bishops, to whom reference is made, were those who were also called *πρεσβύτεροι*, or presbyters. It will also be noticed in passing that the matter of appointment was with the churches.*

* Note on chapter xv of *The Teaching of the Apostles*, by Professors Hitchcock and Brown: "'Now appoint for yourselves,' *χειροτονήσατε οὖν ἑαυτοῖς*] *Χειροτονέω* occurs only twice in the New Testament (Acts xiv, 23; 2 Cor. viii, 19), and, in both places, means simply to 'appoint.' Josephus used the word in the same sense in *Ant.*, xiii, 2, 2, where Alexander Balas, the pretended son of Antiochus Epiphanes, 'appoints' Jonathan high-priest. The same meaning appears in *Ant.*, vii, 9, 3; viii, 11, 1. In *Ant.*, vi, 5, 4, however, the noun *χειροτονία* is used of the coronation of Saul. In Josephus, accordingly, the *prevailing* sense of *χειροτονέω* is to 'appoint.' This is the meaning of the word also in the epistles of Ignatius (about 115 A. D.). See Philadelphians, chap. 10; Smyrnæans, chap. 11; Polycarp, chap. 7.

"But in the 'Apostolic Canons,' i and ii, and in the 'Apostolic Constitutions,' viii, 4, 5, *χειροτονέω* means to 'ordain.' This represents the usage of the third century, as the New Testament, Josephus, and Ignatius represent the usage of the first and second centuries.

"Now, it is noteworthy that in the 'Apostolic Constitutions,' vii, 31 (the section corresponding to the passage before us), the word em-

Turning to the New Testament, which is the ultimate and sufficient authority, the case is very clear. It will be necessary to cite only a few instances showing that the same persons were called bishops and presbyters.

Paul sends for the "elders," or presbyters, of the Church of Ephesus (Acts xx, 17) to meet him at Miletus, and in his address he thus charges them: "Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers." (Acts xx, 28.) Here the Greek word rendered overseers is *ἐπισκόπους*, which means bishops, and, so, in the Revised Version, it is rendered bishops, and the equivalent word, overseers, is put in the margin. Now Paul sends for the "elders" (and the Greek word is *πρεσβυτέρους*, or presbyters, as it is rendered in the margin of the Revised Version), but, when these elders, or *πρεσβύτεροι*, come, he addresses them as

ployed is not *χειροτονέω*, which then meant to 'ordain,' but *προχειρίζομαι*, a new usage having obtained. In this fifteenth chapter of the 'Teaching,' *χειροτονέω* is employed, evidently, in its original sense of 'appoint.' This indicates the high antiquity of the document, antedating by decades, if not by a whole century, the 'Apostolic Canons,' and the 'Apostolic Constitutions.'

"As for the officers to be 'appointed,' only bishops and deacons are mentioned. By bishops must, of course, be meant presbyters, or elders. There is no sign of a bishop as distinguished from a presbyter, nor of a ruling elder as distinguished from a teaching elder; and, apparently, there was in each congregation a plurality both of bishops (or elders) and deacons."

ἐπίσκοποι, or bishops, showing that, as he called the presbyters bishops, he understood that the word presbyter and bishop meant the same ministerial order.*

It is also worthy of note that the apostles refer to themselves as elders. Thus in 1 Pet. v, 1, the apostle says: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder," or, as it is in the Revised Version, "a fellow-elder." Here Peter speaks of himself as an elder.

In the second verse of the same chapter the apostle says to these elders: "Feed the flock of Christ which is among you, taking the oversight thereof." Now, to take oversight is to be an overseer or bishop, and the Greek word rendered oversight in this place is *ἐπισκοποῦντες*, which means acting the part of an *episcopus* or bishop; so that the work of an elder was episcopal and these elders were bishops. Again, in the Second Epistle of John, the apostle says: "The elder unto the elect lady;" so that John, the apostle, calls himself an elder or presbyter, and Archdeacon Farrar has a long dissertation proving that the "John the presbyter" referred to by some of the Christian fathers was "John the apostle."† Mosheim remarks: "That the terms bishops and presbyters are applied promiscuously, as synonymous, in the books of the New Testament, is

* See also Phil. i, 1; Titus 1, 7, etc.

† Farrar's *Early Days of Christianity*, Appendix.

most clearly manifest from Acts xx, 17, 28; Phil. i, 1; Tit. i, 5, 7.” *

Thus the writings of the Christian fathers and the New Testament show that in the early days of the Christian Church bishops and elders were the same persons, and that the words represented the same clerical order. A better summary of the whole question cannot be found than that given by Dr. Lightfoot, Bishop of Durham, in his commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians, and here it will be profitable to quote from him on this point. In his dissertation on “the synonyms ‘bishop’ and ‘presbyter’” he says :

“It is a fact now generally recognized by theologians of all shades of opinion, that in the language of the New Testament the same officer in the Church is called indifferently ‘bishop’ (ἐπίσκοπος) and ‘elder,’ or presbyter (πρεσβύτερος).

“*Episcopus*, ‘bishop,’ ‘overseer,’ was an official title among the Greeks. In Athenian language it was used especially to designate commissioners appointed to regulate a new colony or acquisition, so that the Attic ‘bishop’ corresponded to the Spartan ‘harmost.’ Thus the impostor who intrudes upon the colonists in Aristophanes† says, ἐπίσκοπος ἦκω δεῦρο τῷ κνᾶμῳ λαχών. These officers are mentioned also in an

* Mosheim’s *Historical Commentaries on the State of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, vol. i, xxxviii, note, p. 162.

† *Av.* 1022.

inscription, Boeckh No. 73. The title, however, is not confined to Attic usage; it is a designation, for instance, of the inspectors whose business it was to report to the Indian kings; * of the commissioner appointed by Mithridates to settle affairs in Ephesus; † of magistrates who regulated the sale of provisions under the Romans; ‡ and of certain officers in Rhodes whose functions are unknown. §

“In the LXX. the word is common. In some places it signifies ‘inspectors,’ ‘superintendents,’ ‘taskmasters,’ as 2 Kings xi, 19; 2 Chron. xxxiv, 12, 17; Isa. lx, 17. In others it is a higher title, ‘captains’ or ‘presidents.’ Neh. xi, 9, 14, 22. Of Antiochus Epiphanes we are told that when he determined to overthrow the worship of the one true God he ‘appointed commissioners (ἐπισκόπους, bishops) over all the people’ to see that his orders were obeyed. || The feminine ἐπισκοπή, which is not a classical word, occurs very frequently in the LXX., denoting sometimes the work, sometimes the office, of an ἐπίσκοπος. Hence it passed into the language of the New Testament and of the Christian Church.

“Thus, beyond the fundamental idea of *inspection*, which lies at the root of the word ‘bishop,’ its usage

* Arrian, *Ind.*, xii, 5.

† Appian, *Mithr.*, 48.

‡ Charisius in the *Dig.*, l. 4, 18.

§ Ross, *Inscr. Græc. Ined.*, fasc. 111, Nos. 275, 276.

|| 1 Macc. i, 51; comp. Joseph., *Ant.*, xii, 5, 4; in 2 Macc. v, 22, the word is ἐπιστάτας.

suggests two subsidiary notions also : (1) Responsibility to a superior power ; (2) the introduction of a new order of things.

“ The earlier history of the word *presbyterus* (elder, presbyter, or priest) is much more closely connected with its Christian sense. If the analogies of the ‘bishop’ are to be sought chiefly among heathen nations, the name and office of the ‘presbyter’ are essentially Jewish. Illustrations indeed might be found in almost all nations, ancient or modern, in the *γερονσία* of Sparta, for instance, in the ‘senatus’ of Rome, in the ‘signoria’ of Florence, or in the ‘aldermen’ of our own country and time, where the deliberative body originally took its name from the advanced age of its members. But among the chosen people we meet at every turn with presbyters or elders in Church and State from the earliest to the latest times. In the lifetime of the lawgiver, in the days of the judges, throughout the monarchy, during the captivity, after the return, and under the Roman domination, the ‘elders’ appear as an integral part of the governing body of the country. But it is rather in a special religious development of the office, than in these national and civil presbyteries, that we are to look for the prototype of the Christian minister. Over every Jewish synagogue, whether at home or abroad, a council of ‘elders’ presided. It was not unnatural, therefore, that, when the Christian synagogue took its place by the side of the Jewish, a similar organization

should be adopted with such modifications as circumstances required; and thus the name familiar under the old dispensation was retained under the new.

“Of the identity of the ‘bishop’ and ‘presbyter’ in the language of the apostolic age the following evidence seems conclusive:

“(1.) In the opening of this epistle St. Paul salutes the ‘bishops’ and ‘deacons.’ Now it is incredible that he should recognize only the first and third order, and pass over the second, though the second was absolutely essential to the existence of a church, and formed the staple of its ministry. It seems, therefore, to follow of necessity that the ‘bishops’ are identical with the ‘presbyters.’

“(2.) In the Acts (xx, 17) St. Paul is represented as summoning to Miletus the ‘elders’ or ‘presbyters’ of the church of Ephesus. Yet in addressing them immediately after he appeals to them as ‘bishops’ or ‘overseers’ of the Church (xx, 28).

“(3.) Similarly St. Peter, appealing to the ‘presbyters’ of the churches addressed by him, in the same breath urges them to ‘fulfill the office of bishops’ (ἐπισκοποῦντες) with disinterested zeal. 1 Pet. v, 1, 2.

“(4.) Again, in the First Epistle to Timothy St. Paul, after describing the qualifications for the office of a ‘bishop’ (iii, 1–7), goes on at once to say what is required of ‘deacons’ (iii, 8–13). He makes no mention of presbyters. The term ‘presbyter,’ however,

is not unknown to him; for, having occasion in a later passage to speak of Christian ministers, he calls these officers no longer ‘bishops,’ but ‘presbyters’ (v, 17-19).

“(5.) The same identification appears still more plainly from the apostle’s directions to Titus (i, 5-7): ‘That thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting and ordain *elders* in every city, as I appointed thee; if any one be *blameless*, the husband of one wife, having believing children who are not charged with riotousness or unruly; for a *bishop* (τὸν ἐπίσκοπον) must be *blameless*,’ etc.

“(6.) Nor is it only in the apostolic writings that this identity is found. St. Clement of Rome wrote probably in the last decade of the first century, and in his language the terms are still convertible. Speaking of the apostles he says that ‘preaching in every country and city (κατὰ χώρας καὶ κατὰ πόλεις) they appointed their first-fruits, having tested them by the Spirit, to be *bishops* and *deacons* of them that should believe (μελλόντων πιστεύειν).’—§ 42. A little later, referring to the disorganized state of the Corinthian Church, he adds: ‘Our apostles knew through the Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife concerning the authority (ἐπὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος) of the *bishopric*’ . ‘We shall incur no slight guilt if we eject from the *bishopric* those who have presented the offerings (δῶρα) unblamably and holily. Blessed are the *presbyters* who have gone before, whose de-

parture was crowned with fruit and mature (*οἷτινες ἔγκαρπον καὶ τελείαν ἔσχον τὴν ἀνάλυσιν.*)' § 44" *

In regard to the history of the two words, presbyters and bishops, Lightfoot has also other interesting observations in which he maintains that the Christian presbytery was adopted from the Jewish synagogue. Referring to the persecutions and to the "dispersion of the twelve on a wider mission," he says:

"Since Jerusalem would no longer be their home as hitherto, it became necessary to provide for the permanent direction of the Church there; and for this purpose the usual government of the synagogue would be adopted. Now at all events for the first time we read of 'presbyters' in connection with the Christian brotherhood at Jerusalem.

"From this time forward all official communications with the mother Church are carried on through their intervention. To the presbyters Barnabas and Saul bear the alms contributed by the Gentile churches. The presbyters are persistently associated with the apostles, in convening the congress, in the superscription of the decree, and in the general settlement of the dispute between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. By the presbyters St. Paul is received many years later, on his last visit to Jerusalem, and to them he gives an account of his missionary labors and triumphs.

* Lightfoot's *Commentary on Philippians*. Eighth Edition, London, 1885, pp. 95-98.

“But the office was not confined to the mother Church alone. Jewish presbyters existed already in all the principal cities of the dispersion, and Christian presbyteries would early occupy a not less wide area. On their very first missionary journey the apostles Paul and Barnabas are described as appointing presbyters in every church. The same rule was doubtless carried out in all the brotherhoods founded later; but it is mentioned here, and here only, because the words of procedure on this occasion would suffice as a type of the apostles’ dealings elsewhere under similar circumstances.

“The name of the presbyter then presents no difficulty. But what must be said of the term ‘bishop?’ It has been shown that in the apostolic writings the two are only different designations of one and the same office. How and where was this second name originated?

“To the officers of the Gentile churches alone is the term applied, as a synonym for presbyter. At Philippi, in Asia Minor, in Crete, the presbyter is so called. In the next generation the title is employed in a letter written by the Greek Church of Rome to the Greek Church of Corinth. Thus the word would seem to be especially Hellenic. Beyond this we are left to conjecture. But if we may assume that the directors of religious and social clubs among the heathen were commonly so called, it would naturally occur, if not to the Gentile Chris-

tians themselves, at all events to their heathen associates, as a fit designation for the presiding members of the new society. The infant Church of Christ which appeared to the Jew as a synagogue would be regarded by the heathen as a confraternity. But, whatever may have been the origin of the term, it did not altogether dispossess the earlier name ‘presbyter,’ which still held its place as a synonym even in Gentile congregations. And, when at length the term bishop was appropriated to a higher office in the Church, the latter became again, as it had been at first, the sole designation of the Christian elder.” *

With such facts before us as the New Testament contains and as scholars produce from the records of the early history of the Christian Church, the reason for the use of the two names, presbyter and bishop, as applied to persons in precisely the same ministerial order, is not hard to determine. The elder was a familiar title among the Jews, and, so, it has been observed that when the apostles address Jewish Christians they use the term elder or presbyter, but when they address Gentile converts, or those living outside of Palestine and where the Gentiles preponderated, they use the word bishop, probably because, as most or all of them spoke the Greek language and were familiar with Grecian ideas, the Greek word without the Jewish associations would be

* Lightfoot's Dissertation on the Christian Ministry in *Commentary on Philippians*. Eighth Edition, London, 1885, pp. 193, 194.

less objectionable or more easily understood than even a Greek word used to convey an idea drawn from the Jewish synagogue.

Elder was more familiar to the Jews; bishop was more familiar to the Gentile; but the duties and rank of one and the other were the same. The presbyters or elders were charged with the duty of oversight, and that was the work of the *episcopoi*, or overseers. The one originally referred to age or dignity, and the other to function, but as the presbyters had the function of oversight or superintendence they were also *episcopoi*, or bishops, and so the words were used interchangeably. They were two words for the same thing. The elders were bishops, and the bishops were elders.

Mosheim remarks that “when a number of Christians were collected together sufficient to form a Church, certain men of gravity and approved faith were without delay appointed, either by the apostles themselves or their companions, with the assent of the multitude, to preside over it, under the title of presbyters or bishops. By the former of these titles was implied the prudence of old age, rather than age itself, in those who bore it; the latter had allusion to the nature of the function wherewith they were charged.” *

Dean Stanley says: “The presbyters were the ‘sheikhs,’† the elders—those who by seniority had

* Mosheim, vol. I, xxxviii, p. 161. † Sheik, Arabic, a venerable old man.

reached the first rank in the Jewish synagogue. The bishops were the same, viewed under another aspect—the ‘inspectors,’ the ‘auditors,’ of the Grecian churches.” *

Neander thus presents the case: “The name of *presbyters*, which was appropriated to this body, (the governing body of the Church), was derived from the Jewish synagogue. But in the Gentile churches they took the name *ἐπίσκοποι*, *bishops*, a term more significant of their office in the language generally spoken by the members of these churches. The name of *presbyters* denoted the dignity of their office. That of *bishops*, on the other hand, was expressive rather of the nature of their office, *ἐπίσκοπεῖν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν*, *to take the oversight of the church*. Most certainly no other distinction originally existed between them.” †

Pope, in his *Systematic Theology*, very lucidly explains why elder is sometimes used, and why, again, bishop is used to indicate the same person, and his views sustain those already given. He says: “The differences between the terms are obvious. That of elder had reference to age or dignity, and was derived from Judaism; that of bishop to office, and was derived from the Greeks. There is, therefore, no office of eldership as such, but there is, of

* Stanley's *Christian Institutions*, p. 172.

† Neander's Introduction to Coleman's *Apostolical and Primitive Church*, p. 20.

course, an ἐπισκοπή: this is mentioned once in a sad connection, and once as an object of desire. It is remarkable, however, that no episcopate is alluded to, in the sense of a collective body of bishops." *

It appears, then, that in New Testament times, and even since the apostolic Church, the elders were bishops and the bishops were elders—the word elder or presbyter indicating the dignity and clerical order, and the word bishop indicating the official duty of overseeing or superintending; for, as Pope remarks, "there is no office of eldership as such, but there is of course an ἐπισκοπή," the office of an ἐπίσκοπος. The eldership was the ministerial order, the episcopate the office of overseeing, and both belonged to the presbyters.

The parity of presbyters and bishops in New Testament times is taught by the New Testament itself, the fathers of the early Church, and the scholarship of the present day. But how rapidly distinctions in the use of these terms began to be introduced, and to what an extreme they have been carried, subsequent history sadly shows.

It is an interesting study to observe how the title bishop, which in the early Church belonged to every presbyter, was gradually limited in its application to one particular presbyter among a body of presbyters, and then to those of a special class which came to be recognized as a distinct and superior order, and how

* Pope's *Systematic Theology*, iii, p. 343.

that, with the change in application, there came an increase of power and prerogative to the office of bishop.

Referring to the origin of the supremacy of bishops, Hatch says: "I approach this question with the greater diffidence because an hypothesis has long been current which does not admit of direct refutation, and which assigns the origin of this quasi-monarchical government to an institution of either our Lord himself or the apostles acting under his express directions. But in spite of the venerable names by which, for many centuries and in many churches, this hypothesis has been maintained, and in spite also of the disadvantage under which any one labors who declines the short and easy road which it seems to offer, and winds his way through a dense undergrowth of intricate facts, it is impossible, at least for some of us, to accept the belief that the episcopate forms an exception to the general course of the divine government of the world, and to refrain from proceeding to the inquiry whether any causes were in operation which are adequate to account for its supremacy, without resorting to the hypothesis of a special and extraordinary institution." *

Dr. Lightfoot, Bishop of Durham, in discussing the development of the episcopate, thus remarks:

"For the opinion hazarded by Theodoret and adopted by many later writers, that the same offi-

* Hatch on *The Organization of the Early Christian Church*. Second Edition, Revised, London, 1882, p. 84.

cers in the Church who were first called apostles came afterward to be designated bishops, is baseless. If the two offices had been identical, the substitution of the one name for the other would have required some explanation. But, in fact, the functions of the apostle and the bishop differed widely. The apostle, like the prophet or the evangelist, held no *local* office. He was essentially, as his name denotes, a missionary, moving about from place to place founding and confirming new brotherhoods. The only ground on which Theodoret builds his theory is a false interpretation of a passage in St. Paul. At the opening of the epistle to Philippi the presbyters (here called bishops) and deacons are saluted, while in the body of the letter one Epaphroditus is mentioned as an 'apostle' of the Philippians. If 'apostle' here had the meaning which is thus assigned to it, all the three orders of the ministry would be found at Philippi. But this interpretation will not stand. The true apostle, like St. Peter or St. John, bears this title as the messenger, the delegate, of Christ himself; while Epaphroditus is only so styled as the messenger of the Philippian brotherhood; and in the very next clause the expression is explained by the statement that he carried their alms to St. Paul. The use of the word here has a parallel in another passage, where messengers (or apostles) of the churches are mentioned. It is not, therefore, to the apostle that we must look for the prototype of

the bishop. How far, indeed, and in what sense the bishop may be called a successor of the apostles will be a proper subject for consideration ; but the succession at least does not consist in an identity of office.

“The history of the name itself suggests a different account of the origin of the episcopate. If bishop was at first used as a synonym for presbyter, and afterward came to designate the higher officer under whom the presbyter served, the episcopate, properly so called, would seem to have been developed from the subordinate office. In other words, the episcopate was formed not out of the apostolic order by localization, but out of the presbyterial by elevation ; and the title, which originally was common to all, came at length to be appropriated to the chief among them.”*

These are strong words from any scholar, but especially from a prelate of the Church of England, in which so much is made of the episcopal office ; and these with the words of the scholarly Hatch, of the same Church, must have great weight. It is to the presbyters themselves that we are to look for the primary influences which lifted a presbyter above his brother presbyters and gradually limited to him the title of bishop, and gave this elevated episcopate its marked supremacy.

The body of presbyters exercised discipline and “a consensual jurisdiction in matters of dispute between

* Lightfoot's *Dissertation on the Christian Ministry in Commentary on Philippians*. Eighth Edition, London, 1885, pp. 195, 196.

Christian and Christian.” “In those early days it may have been the case that the assembly itself, or persons chosen by the assembly, acted as arbitrators; and to this St. Paul’s words point: ‘If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.’ (1 Cor. 6, 4.) But when the organization of the churches was more complete, it is clear that the jurisdiction belonged to the council of presbyters. ‘Let not those who have disputes,’ say the Clementines, ‘go to law before the civil powers, but let them by all means be reconciled by the elders of the Church, and let them readily yield to their decision’ (Clement. Epist., *Clem. ad Jacob.*, 10.)” *

One of the most important ideas in connection with the presbyterate, if not the most important, was that of governmental jurisdiction, and, hence, when the assembly convened it was quite natural that one should occupy the position of a presiding officer. So Tertullian said: “The most approved elders preside.” †

Hatch observes: “If we look at contemporary organizations, we find that the tendency toward the institution of a president was almost, if not altogether, universal. Whether we look at the municipal councils, at the private associations, religious and secular, with which the East was honeycombed, at the provincial assemblies, at the board of magistrates, at

* Hatch: *Organization of Early Christian Church*. pp. 72, 73.

† Tertull.: *Apol.*, 39.

the administrative councils of the Jews both in Palestine and in the countries of the dispersion, or at the committees of the municipal councils, whose members sometimes bore in common with the Christian and the Jewish councils the names of 'elders' (πρεσβύτεροι), we find in every case evidence of the existence of a presiding officer." *

"These facts and these general considerations of probability seem adequate to account for the fact that the Christian communities were borne along with the general drift of contemporary organizations, and that the council of presbyters had a permanent president. They also seem to account for the fact that the functions of that council of presbyters, as described by Clement and Polycarp, are the same in kind as the functions of the bishop as described in the Ignatian epistles. But they are all compatible with the view that the early bishop stood to the presbyters in the relation of a dean to the canons of a cathedral, or of the chairman to the ordinary members of a committee. They do not account for the fact that the bishops of the third and subsequent centuries claimed for themselves exceptional powers, and that the relation of primacy ultimately changed into a relation of supremacy." †

Gradually this presiding presbyter, or presiding elder, from the special oversight which he had as the

* Hatch : *Organization of Early Christian Churches*, pp. 84, 85.

† *Ibid.*, pp. 90, 91.

chief *episcopos*, was permitted to exclusively appropriate the title of bishop, while the others retained the old name of presbyters, and, in course of time, from meaning merely the chief presbyter, the bishop was presumed to possess a distinct and superior clerical order carrying with it rights and privileges not possessed by mere presbyters.

After a time there came the struggle for greater supremacy—"the struggle on the part of the bishops to act as sole judges,* without the *συνέδριον*, or 'consilium,' of presbyters, of which in early times they had been merely the presidents. But there are at least two significant indications that the original conception of the presbyterate never wholly passed away; the one is the fact that in all the ordinals of the Latin Church, both in the prayers and the addresses to the people at the ordination of presbyters, church government is a leading element in the conception of the presbyter's office; the other is the fact that, after the parochial system had come to prevail, the presbyter who was put in charge of a parish was said to be sent not to teach but to rule ('*ad regendum*'); the conception of his office which underlies this expression is preserved to us even in modern times in the familiar title of 'rector.'"[†]

Hatch concludes that "adequate causes have been found not only for the existence of a president,

* In the matter of disputes.

† Hatch's *Organization of Early Christian Churches*, pp. 76, 77.

but also for his supremacy, without resorting to what is not a known fact, but only a counter-hypothesis—the hypothesis of a special institution.” He holds that “the episcopate grew by the force of circumstances,” and that the supremacy of a single officer came through a desire for unity of doctrine and unity of discipline. In this connection he mentions that “St. Jerome, arguing against the growing tendency to exalt the diaconate at the expense of the presbyterate, maintains that the churches were originally governed by a plurality of presbyters, but that in course of time one was elected to preside over the rest as a remedy against division, lest different presbyters, having different views of doctrine, should, by each of them drawing a portion of the community to himself, cause divisions in it (St. Hieron., *Epist.* 146 (85), *ad Evang.*, vol. i, p. 1082, ed Vall.” *

Mosheim also gives an interesting explanation of the rise of the episcopate. He says: “As the congregations of Christians became every day larger and larger, a proportionate gradual increase in the number of the presbyters and ministers of necessity took place; and as the rights and power of all were the same, it was soon found impossible, under the circumstances of that age, when every church was left to the care of itself, for any thing like a general harmony to be maintained amongst them, or for the various necessities of the multitude to be regularly

* Hatch: *Early Christian Churches*, pp. 98–100.

and satisfactorily provided for, without some one to preside and exert a controlling influence. Such being the case, the churches adopted the practice of selecting and placing at the head of the council of presbyters some one man of eminent wisdom and prudence, whose peculiar duty it should be to allot to his colleagues their several tasks, and by his advice, and every other mode of assistance, to prevent, as far as in him lay, the interests of the assembly over which he was thus appointed to preside from experiencing any kind of detriment or injury. The person thus advanced to the presidency was at first distinguished by the title of ‘the angel’ of his church ; but in after times it became customary to style him, in allusion to those duties which constituted the chief branch of his function, ‘the bishop.’ In what particular church or at what precise period this arrangement was first introduced remains nowhere on record.” *

“This statement respecting the origin of the order of bishops must, I am persuaded, obtain the assent of every one who knows what human nature is, and shall reflect on the situation of things in that early age. . That the first churches had no bishops may, I think, very clearly be proved from the writings of the New Testament. Neither in the Acts of the Apostles nor in St. Paul’s epistles, although in both express mention is frequently made of presbyters and deacons, do we find the least notice taken of

* Mosheim, vol. i, xli, p. 169.

any church having been subject to the authority or rule of a single man." *

"That these bishops were, on their creation, invested with certain peculiar rights, and a degree of power which placed them above the presbyters, will not be disputed by any unprejudiced or impartial person. . It is certain, however, that it would be forming a very erroneous judgment were we to estimate the power, the revenue, the privileges, and rights of the first bishops, from the rank, affluence, and authority attached to the episcopal character in the present day. A primitive bishop was, as it should seem, none other than the chief or principal minister of an individual church, which, at the period of which we are speaking, was seldom so numerous but that it could be assembled under one roof. Whatever arrangements might be deemed eligible were proposed by him to the people for their adoption in a general assembly. In fine, a primitive bishop could neither determine nor enact any thing of himself, but was bound to conform to and carry into effect whatever might be resolved on by the presbyters and the people." †

"It was not long, however, before circumstances became so changed as to produce a considerable extension and enlargement of the limits within which the episcopal government and authority had been at first confined. For the bishops who presided in the

* Mosheim, vol. i, xli, note 1.

† *Ibid.*, vol. i, xlii.

cities were accustomed to send out into the neighboring towns and country adjacent certain of their presbyters, for the purpose of making converts and establishing churches therein ; and it being, of course, deemed but fair and proper that the rural or village congregations, which were drawn together in this way, should continue under the guardianship and authority of the prelate by whose counsel and exertion they had been first brought to a knowledge of Christ and his word, the episcopal sees gradually expanded into ecclesiastical provinces of varied extent, some greater, some less, to which the Greeks in after times gave the denomination of dioceses. Those to whom the instruction and management of these surrounding country churches were committed by the diocesan were termed chorepiscopi, that is, τῆς χῶρας ἐπισκοποὶ, ‘rural bishops.’” *

A later authority remarks that “The early history of the episcopal order is obscure, but it would appear that the first bishops were established in the chief cities of Christendom, and each bishop had a certain territorial district placed under his superintendence, whence the city was termed the see (*sedes*) of the bishop, and the district his parish (*παροικία*), and subsequently his diocese (*διοίκησις*). In the course of time the districts assigned to the first bishop became too populous, whereupon the clergy of each diocese, as the case might be, appear to have assembled and to

* Mosheim, vol. i, xliii.

have subdivided the diocese, and to have selected a second bishop; and so bishops and dioceses were multiplied, according to the wants of the churches, until it was thought expedient to reserve the right of erecting new bishoprics to provincial councils, and this reservation was made a rule of the Church by a decree of the Council of Sardica.* Meanwhile the bishops of the new sees had grouped themselves round the bishops of the more ancient sees, who exercised over them a certain spiritual authority as primates, and presided in their councils; and as some of the great cities in which the sees of the first bishops had been established were distinguished by the title of ‘metropolis,’ or mother-city, and were in fact the chief cities of civil provinces of the Roman empire, the bishops of these sees came to be distinguished by the title of metropolitan bishops, and exercised a superior authority in the councils of the Church in proportion to the greater importance of their respective sees. This superior dignity of the metropolitan bishops over the others was formally recognized at the Council of Nicæa† as being in accordance with custom. Upon the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the Roman empire a coercive jurisdiction was ingrafted on the spiritual superiority of the metropolitan; and the district over which the metropolitan exercised this jurisdiction was called his province, the earliest ecclesiastical provinces

* A. D. 347.

† A. D. 325.

being for the most part conterminous with the civil provinces of the empire. From the circumstance that there was no metropolitan city in western Africa, the term metropolitan was never adopted in the Carthaginian Church, the senior bishop of that church being termed the primate, and having precedence and authority as such over other bishops." *

Thus from the simplicity of New Testament times, when presbyter and bishop were synonymous terms, as applied to the same person, though one indicated the order and the other the office, there was a gradual modification. After a time the presbyter presiding over other presbyters appropriated the distinctive title of bishop, but still he was only a presbyter-bishop. Then, from the innocent idea of a presiding presbyter or presiding elder, the presiding officer or bishop claimed supremacy of order and exclusive authority over the presbyters. The metropolitan bishop obtained jurisdiction over the other bishops in the province, and the tendency to centralization and the assertion of superior authority went on until the bishop in the greatest city of Europe and the center of the Roman empire claimed superiority over all the rest.

At first the bishop of Rome was conceded only an "ideal precedence," but the bishops of Rome soon showed their eager desire to make this honorary supremacy mean a real superiority over all other bishops.

* *Ency. Britannica*. Ninth Edition, art. "Bishop," by Sir Travers Twiss, Q. C.

The claim was at first "promptly and emphatically denied in all parts of the world," * yet gradually the persistent claim, aided by all kinds of weapons and furthered by such men as Leo I. (440-461), Gregory I. (590-604), and ultimately by Hildebrand, or Gregory VII. (1073), made its way until there was not only the assertion of the superiority of the pope of Rome over other bishops, but also the assertion of "a theocratic rule of the pope over all the nations of the world."

Thus we see how evil may gradually grow out of that which at first seemed a harmless expedient or what probably appeared to be a necessary prudential arrangement. Such are the possibilities of human government and human nature.

* McClintock & Strong's *Bib. and Theol. Cyclopædia*, art. "Papacy."

CHAPTER II.

EPISCOPACY IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

IN studying the episcopacy of the Church of England, it is not necessary for our present purpose to go back farther than the time of the Reformation.

Prior to the Protestant Reformation the English Church, like all Churches under papal domination, had an episcopal form of government. After the Reformation, however, the Churches on the Continent of Europe discarded episcopacy, while it was retained by the Protestant Reformed Church of England.

The explanation of the difference in this particular is not difficult. The Protestants on the Continent, though springing from an episcopal Church, abandoned the organization for the simple reason that the hierarchy sided with the papacy. In England, on the contrary, Protestantism continued to be episcopal because the bishops generally were in harmony with King Henry VIII. in his opposition to the pope. Thus it happened that Continental Protestantism became presbyterian and English Protestantism remained episcopal.*

* Butler's *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 39. Fisher's *History of Reformation*, p. 332.

The question now arises as to how the English Protestant Reformed Church regarded its episcopacy. Did the English reformers understand that bishops were in a clerical order distinct from and superior to that of presbyters? Did they maintain that episcopacy was by divine right? Did they teach that there could be no true Christian Church without episcopal government? Did they hold that episcopal ordination was the only valid ministerial ordination?

In 1537, shortly after the separation of the Anglican Church from Rome, there was published by the authority of the king, the *Institution of a Christian Man*. As it was prepared mainly by the bishops it was also called the *Bishops' Book*. Referring to the various clerical orders in the Church of Rome, it declares: "The truth is, that in the New Testament there is no mention made of any degrees or distinctions in orders, but only of deacons or ministers, and of priests or bishops."* This is a clear statement that they believed that presbyters (or priests) and bishops were the same order.

In 1543, by order of the king, the *Institution* was revised and issued under the title of *A Necessary Doctrine and Erudition of a Christian Man*. It says: "Of these two orders only, that is to say, priests and deacons, Scripture maketh express mention."

* Burnet's *History of Reformation*, ii, Collection of Records, Adenda v.

Referring to the former "paper concerning orders and ecclesiastical functions," Bishop Burnet remarks: "Both in this writing and in the *Necessary Erudition of a Christian Man*, bishops and priests are spoken of as one and the same office. In the ancient Church they knew none of these subtleties which were found out in the latter ages." *

In 1540 King Henry submitted a number of questions, drawn up by Archbishop Cranmer, to the bishops and learned divines, who were to write their answers. The tenth query involved the question of the parity of bishops and priests, or presbyters, and was as follows: "Whether bishops or priests were first, and if the priests were first, then the priest made the bishop?" To this the Archbishop of Canterbury replied that "the bishops and priests at one time were not two things, but both one office in the beginning of Christ's religion;" and the Archbishop of York said: "The name of a bishop is not properly a name of order, but a name of office, signifying an overseer." †

Some of the answers were indefinite, and some may be accepted as antagonistic, but these replies of the two archbishops represent the views of the English reformers. They held that there were only two clerical orders, namely, priests and deacons, and that bishops and priests were not different orders, but the same

* Burnet's *History of Reformation*, Addenda to Part I.

† *Ibid.*, Records, xxv.

order, the name bishop not indicating an order, but an office.

The eleventh question was, "Whether a bishop hath authority to make a priest by the Scripture, or no? And whether any other but only a bishop may make a priest?" To this the Archbishop of York replied: "That any other than bishops or priests may make a priest, we neither find in Scripture nor out of the Scripture,"* which is a positive affirmation that priests or presbyters may make an elder, and that consequently a presbyter made by presbyters would have a valid ministry. In other words, it is an admission of the equality of bishops and presbyters in the matter of ordination, and hence as to their orders.

The twelfth question was, "Whether in the New Testament be required any consecration of bishops or priests, or only appointing to the office be sufficient?" To this Cranmer replied: "In the New Testament he that is appointed to be a bishop or priest needeth no consecration by the Scriptures, for election or appointing thereto is sufficient."†

This most assuredly was any thing but a high view of any virtue in the act of consecration, and a positive denial of any need of consecration. As to the bishopric, it is beyond dispute that he regarded it not as a clerical order but as an office, which was held only at the pleasure of the power that could fill the office.

* Burnet's *History of Reformation*, Records, xxv.

† *Ibid.*

Hence, on the death of Henry, Cranmer considered that he ceased to be Archbishop of Canterbury until he was re-appointed by the new sovereign.

We now turn to consider the relations existing between the episcopal Church of England and the non-episcopal Reformed Churches on the continent. Remembering the declarations of the representatives of the Protestant Reformed Church of England, which have been quoted, there could be only one natural result, namely, a feeling of fraternity and a recognition of equality.

Holding, as the Anglican Church did, that presbyters and bishops were the same order, and that the bishopric was an office and not an order, and that presbyters as well as bishops could ordain, they could not logically deny the legality of the presbyterial ordination and government of the non-episcopal Reformed Churches. This was to admit that an episcopal government was not necessary for a true church, and that episcopal ordination was not necessary for a valid ministry. The facts show that in practice they admitted the validity of presbyterian orders, and that they saw nothing in their episcopal organization to prevent the closest fraternal relations with the Protestant Reformed Churches on the Continent which had only presbyterial ordination.

Dr. Campbell, Archbishop of Canterbury, in one of his addresses "at his primary visitation" in 1872, admitted this close relationship. He said: "Every

one knows that we of the Church of England, in the early times of our history, after the Reformation, were much more connected with the non-episcopal than with the episcopal communions." *

This admission, of one so thoroughly informed as England's primate, has the force of strong corroborative proof. The intimate character of the fraternal relations existing between the Anglican Episcopal Church and the Continental Presbyterian Churches appears from many facts, a few of which may be recited. Thus Henry VIII. sent two invitations urging Melancthon to visit England, and it appears that, subsequently, Melancthon was offered the chair of divinity at Cambridge. Thomas Cromwell wanted to bring about an alliance of all Protestantism, and Cranmer tried to secure a council "of wise and godly men" to compare their opinions, and to come to some agreement, and for this purpose he invited Melancthon, Calvin, and Bullinger to co-operate. He also invited Continental reformers to come to England and assist in the English Reformation. Among those who came were Martyr the Florentine, and Bucer the Reformed minister of Strasburg. Martyr was made a canon, and given the professorship of divinity at Oxford, and Bucer was made divinity professor at Cambridge.

This fraternal recognition of the non-episcopal

* Archbishop Campbell's *Present Position of the Church of England*, London, 1872, p. 90.

bodies carries with it conclusive proof that the Anglican Church did not hold that a presbyterian Church was not a true Church, or that an episcopal form of government and an episcopal ordination were necessary to make a valid ministry.

When the English reformers came to the work of preparing their liturgies they used not only the ancient offices of the English Church, but also the liturgies of the foreign Reformed Churches, and were assisted in the construction of the Anglican liturgies by ministers from the Reformed Churches on the Continent.

When, in 1552, they prepared their Articles of Religion, they were again indebted to the foreign Reformed Churches. Peter Martyr had an important part in this task, as he also had in the construction of the Second Book of Common Prayer, and, as a basis of action by the commission, Cranmer submitted thirteen articles made up chiefly from the Augsburg Confession. Thus the forty-two articles which were adopted were based upon the Augsburg Confession, just as the Anglican Prayer-Book was indebted to the liturgies of the Continental Reformed Churches. In this fact there was a tacit recognition of Churches which were without episcopal government, but the English reformers at this time went further, and did not hesitate to refer to the non-episcopal Protestant bodies on the Continent as true Churches.

There was nothing in the forty-two articles, or the

thirty-nine articles, as they afterward became, which affirmed the absolute necessity of episcopal government, or any thing which denied the validity of non-episcopal bodies. On the contrary, it is evident from the circumstances, from the phraseology, and from the testimony of history, that they were expressly intended to acknowledge the Protestant Reformed Churches, which were not episcopal.

We turn to the forty-two articles to see if there is any thing that declares the invalidity of non-episcopal churches. The twentieth article (now the nineteenth), on the Church, says :

“The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.”

In this definition of a Christian Church there is no proclamation or suggestion of episcopal government as a requisite, or, indeed, of the necessity of any particular form of polity, but its very wording leads to the inference that, though forms vary, there might be in all the true visible Church. Its definition of “the visible Church of Christ” is “a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered.” Even in regard to preaching and the administration of the sacraments, it seems to suggest that there may be differences, for all that is required is that these

shall be done "in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same;" but it does not presume to declare in detail what things are necessary. This article, therefore, gave them latitude to recognize any Protestant body, no matter what its form of government might be, whether Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Congregational; and, from the relations existing between the English reformers and the Continental reformers, the legitimate inference is that this article was so constructed for the express purpose of covering the other Protestant Reformed Churches, which were not episcopal.

The twenty-fourth article (now the twenty-third), defining the ministry, says :

"It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called and sent to execute the same. And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation, to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard."

There is not a single word in this article declaring the necessity of apostolic succession through bishops or others, or of ordination by bishops as distinct from presbyters, or of the necessity of three ministerial orders.

Whatever the Church of England of that day pre-

ferred for itself, when it came to define a valid ministry for the Christian Churches in general, it did not specify how many ministerial orders there should be, or by what particular form or method the minister should be set apart for his work. The article merely declares that a minister is one who is "lawfully called" to the work of "preaching, or ministering the sacraments," and that those are "lawfully called and sent" "which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard." This is so broad that it recognizes those called and set apart according to the law and form of any church, or, where the church is congregational, by the independent congregation; and the article distinctly says, in the phrase "we ought," that the Church of England "ought to judge" such persons as "lawfully called and sent," or, in other words, as legitimate Christian ministers. Indeed, it was the evident intention of the makers of this article to recognize the ministry of those Protestant Reformed Churches which were without episcopal government. So Bishop Burnet says: "The general words in which this part of the article is framed seem to have been designed on purpose not to exclude them." *

That the English reformers intended to recognize diversities of government and usage in the true

* Burnet on the XXXIX Articles. See on Art. XXIII.

Church may be inferred from the thirty-third article (now the thirty-fourth). It says :

“ It is not necessary that traditions and ceremonies be in all places one, or utterly like ; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men’s manners, so that nothing be ordained against God’s word.”

So that though the Book of Common Prayer and the various rites and ceremonies of the Anglican Church were “ by all faithful members of the Church of England, but chiefly of the ministers of the word, with all thankfulness and readiness of mind, to be received, approved, and commended to the people of God ” (Article XXXV of the forty-two articles), yet there is not the slightest disposition manifested to expect them to be received by other churches, or the faintest intimation that churches not conforming to them are not true churches ; but, on the contrary, that a Christian body may be a true church, though differing in “ traditions and ceremonies,” and Bishop Burnet, commenting on the articles, declares “ that not only those who penned the articles, but the body of this Church for above half an age after, did, notwithstanding these irregularities, acknowledge the foreign churches so constituted to be true churches as to all the essentials of a church, though they had been irregularly formed and continued still to be in an imperfect state.” *

* Burnet on the XXXIX Articles. See on Art. XXIII.

It is true that the preface to the Ordinal of 1550 speaks of the orders of bishops, priests, and deacons, but this was an inheritance from the other days. We have seen how it happened that the episcopal form was retained in England, though it was discarded on the Continent, so that the Church in England continued to be episcopal while the Protestant Church on the Continent became presbyterial. Under the circumstances it was quite natural that, having the episcopal form, they would provide for its perpetuity.

Further, in the light of other declarations, such as those which have been quoted, it must appear that the word order in reference to bishops must have been used in a qualified sense, for it was expressly declared, not only by individuals in authority, but also by official and authoritative statements, that bishops and priests were the same order, and that bishop was not indicative of order but of office.

Goode, referring to the preface, says: "The remark there made as to the three orders of the ministry having existed from the times of the apostles is simply the statement of a fact, which does not touch the question of the validity of the orders of the foreign non-episcopal churches." *

To declare that there have been the orders of bishops, priests, and deacons, since the times of the

* *The Divine Rule of Faith and Practice*, by William Goode, M.A., F.S.A., of Trinity College, Cambridge, Rector of All Hallows the Great and Less, London. London, 1855, pp. 290, 291.

apostles is not saying that there must be three orders, or that the body which does not have them is not a Christian Church.

It does not necessarily imply that a non-episcopal government is not valid, but may be looked upon merely as a statement of what was presumed to be an historical fact, rather than an assertion of the illegality of a ministry which is without three orders. One might indeed believe that there have been three orders simply as a supposed fact of history, and yet disbelieve in their absolute necessity.

The preface is not a declaration of the invalidity of non-episcopal orders, and, as Goode says, "It is not pretended that the language itself contains any such declaration. It has been shown again and again that no such notion could by any possibility have been in the minds of the framers. The first part is the simple statement of a fact without intent on the part of the authors to pass upon other forms of government, but as giving a sufficient warrant for their own."*

So Dr. Blakeney says: "It does not follow, because there have been three orders in the Church from the apostles' time, that no ordination is valid unless it is episcopal." †

* Goode on Orders. New York, pp. 17, 18.

† *The Book of Common Prayer in its History and Interpretation*, by Rev. R. P. Blakeney, D.D., LL.D., Incumbent of Christ Church, Cloughton. Third Ed., Revised and Enlarged, London, 1870, p. 628.

Dr. Blakeney, in another place, declares that, "In fact, no one of the Church of England in those days thought of calling into question the validity of the orders and sacraments of the Reformed Churches." *

Dr. Butler, Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the Divinity School of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, having carefully studied "the testimonies of the reformers, public and private," says: "The result of the inquiry is a perfect demonstration that the dogma of later times, which makes episcopacy necessary to the existence of the Church and the administration of sacraments, was not only not held by them, but had not even been broached among them." †

There was nothing in all this that even intimated the existence of episcopacy as of divine authority, or the necessity of episcopal government in a true church, or of episcopal ordination for a valid ministry.

Notwithstanding this Preface to the Ordinal, the Anglican Church, nevertheless, affiliated with the non-episcopal churches, and by word and act recognized them as true churches, having as valid a ministry as their own, though the English Church had episcopal ordination, while that which the Continental Protestant Churches had was presbyterial.

* *Book of Common Prayer in its History and Interpretation*, by Rev. R. P. Blakeney, D.D., LL.D., Incumbent of Christ Church, Cloughton. Third Edition, London, 1870, p. 630.

† Butler, *Com. Prayer Interpreted*. 2nd Ed., Washington, note, p. 379.

Nothing more clearly embodies the evidence of the attitude of the Anglican Church than the indisputable fact that ministers who had only presbyterial ordination were admitted into the ministry of the Church of England without re-ordination, and thus was practically recognized the validity of ordination by presbyters and the equality of such ordination with that received from bishops.

In Elizabeth's time Parliament enacted "That the ordination of foreign Churches should be held valid," and Keble, High Churchman though he was, admits, in his preface to Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, that "Nearly up to the time when Hooker wrote (which was about the close of the sixteenth century), numbers had been admitted to the ministry of the Church of England with no better than the presbyterial ordination; and it appears . . . that such was the construction not uncommonly put upon the statute of the thirteenth of Elizabeth, permitting those who had received orders in any other form than that of the English Service Book, on giving certain securities, to exercise their calling in England."

Nothing could show more clearly that the Church of England in that day did not believe in a divine right episcopacy, or that episcopacy was necessary for a true church or a valid ministry.

Referring to those who defended episcopacy during Elizabeth's day, Keble confesses that they made no exclusive claims for episcopacy. He says: "It is

enough, with them, to show that the government by archbishops and bishops is ancient and allowable; they never venture to urge its exclusive claim, or to connect the succession with the validity of the holy sacraments."

Referring to changes made in the Liturgy in King Edward's time, he remarks that, "It should seem that those who were responsible for those omissions must have felt themselves precluded ever after from urging the necessity of episcopacy, or of any thing else, on the grounds of uniform church tradition." *

Bishop Jewel, in 1562, published his apology for the Anglican Church. In it he said: "But what meant M. Harding to come in here with the difference between priests and bishops? Thinketh he that priests and bishops hold only by tradition? Or is it so horrible a heresy as he maketh it, to say that by the Scriptures of God a bishop and a priest are all one? Or knoweth he how far and unto whom he reacheth the name of heretic? Verily Chrysostom saith, '*Inter episcopum et presbeterum interest fere nihil*,' 'Between a bishop and a priest in a manner there is no difference' (in 1 Tim., hom. ii). S. Hierome saith, somewhat in a rougher sort, '*Audio, quendam in tantam eripuisse vecordiam, ut diaconus presbyteris, id est episcopis, anteferret: cum apostolus prespicue doceat, eosdem esse presbyteros, quos episcopos*,' 'I hear say, there is one becomes so peevish

* Keble's Pref. to Hooker's *Eccl. Polity*.

that he setteth deacons before priests, that is to say, bishops; whereas, the apostle plainly teacheth us that priests and bishops be all one' (*Ad Evagr.*). S. Augustine also saith, '*Quid est episcopus nisi primus presbyter, hoc est, summus sacerdos,*' 'What is a bishop but the first priest; that is to say, the highest priest?' (In *Quæst. N. et V. Test.*, q. 101.) So saith S. Ambrose, '*Episcopi et presbyteri una ordinatio est; uterque, enim, sacerdos est, sed episcopus primus est,*' 'There is but one consecration (*ordinatio*) of priest and bishop; for both of them are priests, but the bishop is the first' (In *1 Tim.*, c. 3). All these, and other more holy fathers, together with St. Paul the apostle, for thus saying, by M. Harding's advice, must be holden for heretics." *

This prelate, therefore, held that "bishop and priest are all one," only that the bishop was the first priest, and, as they were the same order, it was fitting there should be "but one ordination of priest and bishop; for both of them are priests," that is to say presbyters. This is a clear admission of the parity of bishops and presbyters as to clerical order. Harding had charged that the Church of England had derived its orders from apostate bishops. To this Bishop Jewel replied as follows:

"Neither doth the Church of England this day depend of them whom you often call apostates, as if our Church were no church without them. . . . If

* Jewel's *Apol.*, pt. 2, c. 9, div. 1.

there were not one, neither of them or of us left alive, yet would not, therefore, the whole Church of England flee to Lovaine. Tertullian saith, ‘And we, being laymen, are we not priests? It is written, Christ hath made us both a kingdom and priests unto God his Father. The authority of the Church and the honor by the assembly or council of order, sanctified of God, hath made a difference between the lay and the clergy. Where, as there is no assembly of ecclesiastical order, the priest being there alone (without the company of other priests), doth both minister the oblation, and also baptize. Yea, and be there but three together, and though they be laymen, yet is there a church. For every man liveth of his own faith.’ Whosoever is a member of Christ’s body, whosoever is a child of the Church, whosoever is baptized in Christ and beareth his name, is fully invested with this priesthood (that is, as he explains it in the context, the ‘inward priesthood’), and therefore may justly be called a priest. And wheresoever there be three such together, as Tertullian saith, yea, though they be only laymen, yet have they a church.” *

So Jewel held not only that apostolical succession was not necessary, but also that episcopal succession and ordination were not necessary to constitute a true church. He went even further, and, accepting Tertullian’s idea, maintained that even laymen may form

* Jewel’s *Def. of Apol.*, pt. 2, c. 5, div. 1, Works, ed. 1611, p. 129.

a church and set in motion a valid ecclesiastical organization with all the functions of a genuine Christian Church. In this connection it should be remembered that Bishop Jewel's *Apology* was considered to be the standard of the doctrine of the Anglican Church on this subject, and, on this account, was ordered to be suspended by a chain in all the churches, and to be publicly read as a standard of theological instruction.

In 1563, Dr. Pilkington, then Bishop of Durham, said: "God's commission and commandment is like and indifferent to all, priest, bishop, archbishop, prelate, by what name soever he be called," thus putting them on a level. That he understood elders and bishops to be the same order is evident from his reference to Paul's address to the elders of Ephesus and epistles to the Philippians. Thus he remarked: "He writes also to the bishops of Philippos, meaning the ministers;" and then, alluding to St. Jerome, he observes that "St. Jerome, in his commentary on the first chapter, *Ad. Tit.*, says that 'a bishop and a priest is all one,' . A bishop is a name of office, labor, and pains." *

Thomas Cartwright, Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, went so far, about 1570, as to contend that the Scriptures ordained the presbyterian system of church polity, and that prelacy was, therefore, unlawful. Archbishop Whitgift, who succeeded to the pri-

* *Confut. of an Addition*, Works, Ed., Park Soc., pp. 493, 494.

macy in 1583, answered such views in 1574. His argument was that no ecclesiastical government was ordained in the New Testament, but that a church was free to organize itself according to circumstances. He said : “ I confess that in a church collected together in one place, and at liberty, government is necessary in the second kind of necessity ; but that any one kind of government is so necessary that without it the church cannot be saved, or that it may not be altered into some other kind thought to be more expedient, I utterly deny, and the reasons that move me so to do be these. The first is, because I find no one certain and perfect kind of government prescribed or commanded in the Scriptures to the Church of Christ, which no doubt should have been done, if it had been a matter necessary unto the salvation of the Church. Secondly, because the essential notes of the Church be these only ; the true preaching of the word of God, and the right administration of the sacraments ; for (as Master Calvin saith in his book against the Anabaptists) : ‘ This honor is meet to be given to the word of God, and to his sacraments, that wheresoever we see the word of God truly preached, and God according to the same truly worshiped, and the sacraments without superstition administered, there we may without all controversy conclude the Church of God to be ; ’ and a little after : ‘ So much we must esteem the word of God and his sacraments, that wheresoever we find them to be, there we may cer-

tainly know the Church of God to be, although in the common life of men many faults and errors be found.' The same is the opinion of other godly and learned writers and the judgment of the Reformed Churches, as appeareth by their confessions. So that notwithstanding government, or some kind of government, may be a part of the Church, touching the outward form and perfection of it, yet is it not such a part of the essence and being, but that it may be the Church of Christ without this or that kind of government, and therefore the kind of government of the Church is not necessary unto salvation." *

Again Whitgift says: "I deny that the Scriptures do set down any one certain form and kind of government of the Church to be perpetual for all times, persons, and places without alteration." † According to this representative of the Church of England and defender of episcopacy, an episcopal form of government was not necessary to constitute a true church, but each body was free to decide as to what form of Church government it would have, and free also to alter that government at pleasure, and consequently a presbyterial form was just as valid as the episcopal, and presbyterial ordination was just as valid as ordination by bishops. He agreed with Calvin and harmonized with the articles of his own Church, that "wheresoever we see the word of God truly preached, and God according to the same truly

* *Def. of Answ. to Adm.*, 1574, p. 81.

† *Ibid.*

worshipped, and the sacraments without superstition administered, there we may conclude the Church of God to be," no matter what may be the nature of the polity of the Church. This was the very opposite to insisting on the necessity of ordination by bishops, who had the "grace of orders" in unbroken succession from the apostles.

Many other authorities might be cited to demonstrate that the early "Protestant Reformed" Church of England did not entertain High Church notions as to episcopacy. With the English reformers, though it seemed convenient to retain the episcopal form, they did not hold that it was essential and that all other forms were unlawful, or that there was no valid ministry without episcopal ordination by bishops of unbroken lineal descent from Christ's apostles, but that bishops and presbyters were the same clerical order, that a presbyterial government was legal, and that presbyterial ordination was just as valid as the episcopal.

But about the close of Queen Elizabeth's time counter opinions began to assert themselves very strongly. The doctrine of "the divine right, as it is called, or absolute indispensability of episcopacy," began then to be advanced. As Hallam remarks, it is "a doctrine of which the first traces, as I apprehend, are found about the end of Elizabeth's reign." *

Bacon, in his *Advertisement concerning Contro-*

* Hallam, *Const. Hist. of England*, chap. vii, p. 387, Widdleton's Amer. Ed.

versies of the Church of England, which was written just at the close of Elizabeth's reign, remarks that "Some indiscreet persons have been bold in open preaching to use dishonorable and derogatory speech and censure of the churches abroad; and that so far, as some of our men, as I have heard, ordained in foreign parts, have been pronounced to be no lawful ministers. Thus we see the beginnings were modest, but the extremes were violent." †

It is evident from this observation of Bacon that the prevailing view of the Anglican Church at that day was in harmony with the view held by the English reformers. The Church still recognized the validity of presbyterial ordination, and the contrary view was exceptional and held only by a few "indiscreet persons," in regard to whom Bacon expresses surprise.

Our limits will not permit a detailed statement of the causes leading to this new development. It may be explained partly by certain circumstances, and partly by well-known tendencies in human nature.

The Puritans were becoming quite strong and aggressive, and those who were devoted to episcopalianism were to some extent thrown upon the defensive. In defending episcopal government the extreme episcopalians would find it a very convenient and decisive method in the discussion if they could affirm and maintain episcopacy to be by divine au-

* Bacon's Works, Montague's Ed., vii, 48.

thority. Whether this was the motive or not it is certain that they resorted to that method, though at first there were only a few who were so bold ; but from this small beginning there was a great growth, and the consequences were very disastrous.

It would be sufficient, however, to account for the new view, that bishops were a higher order than the presbyters, and that only episcopal government and ordination were valid, by a tendency in human nature to reverence that which has come down through the course of many ages. These extreme episcopalians were born under a system which ran far back into the dim past of many centuries, and so had the sanction of great antiquity ; and it was a natural thing to imagine that the easiest way to account for it was to suppose that away back in those early days it had divine sanction, and came into existence directly or indirectly through divine authority. Then they had been accustomed to ordination by bishops alone, and had learned to look upon that as the proper thing. So, by an easy transition, they would come to look upon it as the only valid form of ordination ; and, consequently, consider that ordinations by those who did not occupy the episcopal office must be illegitimate. Further, they noticed how the bishops were distinguished from the ordinary presbyters or priests, not only in the character of their special official duties, but also in many other ways, and it was quite natural that careless thinkers who were too indifferent to investigate, or

who found it to their interest to accept things as they seemed to be, would infer that there was also a distinction of clerical order, and that presbyters were of an inferior order. Doubtless many of the clergy, and the people were in just such a condition that when some bold and indiscreet leader would proclaim that the bishops were a higher order than the presbyters, and that episcopacy was by divine right, and that every other form of church government was contrary to the divine requirement, they would acquiesce; and especially would this be probable if they felt that the episcopal form to which they were attached was in danger.

Bancroft, who was made Bishop of London in 1597, and afterward became Archbishop of Canterbury, is credited, or discredited, with being the first to affirm the notion that episcopacy was by divine right. In his bitter opposition to the Puritans it is said that he declared, in a sermon preached at St. Paul's Cross, in February, 1588, that "bishops were, as an order, superior to priests; that they governed by divine appointment; and that to deny these truths was to deny a portion of the Christian faith." *

The sermon called forth considerable excitement, as strong dissent was expressed by many of the clergy and laity. Sir Francis Knollys, who was greatly dissatisfied, wrote to the learned Dr. Raignolds, Profes-

* McClintock and Strong's Cyclo., art. "Bancroft;" Miller on the Christian Ministry.

sor of Divinity in the University of Oxford, for his opinion. The professor replied thus :

“ Of the two opinions which your honor mentions in the sermon of Dr. Bancroft, the first is that which asserts the superiority which the prelates among us have over the clergy to be a divine institution. He does not, indeed, assert this in express terms, but he does it by necessary consequence, in which he affirms the opinion of those that oppose that superiority to be an heresy, in which, in my judgment, he has committed an oversight ; and I believe he himself will acknowledge it, if duly admonished concerning it.

“ All that have labored in reforming the Church, for five hundred years past, have taught that all pastors, be they entitled bishops or priests, have equal authority and power by God’s word ; as first the Waldenses, next Marsilius Petavinus, then Wicliffe and his disciples ; afterward Huss and the Hussites ; and last of all Luther, Calvin, Brentius, Bullinger, and Musculus. Among ourselves we have bishops, the queen’s professors of divinity in our universities ; and other learned men, as Bradford, Lambert, Jewel, Pilkington, Humphreys, Fulke, who all agree in this matter ; and so do all the divines beyond the sea that I ever read, and doubtless many more whom I never read. But what do I speak of particular persons ? It is the common judgment of the Reformed Churches of Helvetia, Savoy, France, Scotland, Germany, Hun-

gary, Poland, the Low Countries, and our own (the Church of England). Wherefore, since Dr. Bancroft will certainly never pretend that an heresy, condemned by the consent of the whole Church in its most flourishing times, was yet accounted sound and Christian doctrine by all these I have mentioned, I hope he will acknowledge that he was mistaken when he asserted the superiority which bishops have among us over the clergy to be God's own ordinance." *

This shows that the doctrine of the Anglican Church was against the asserted statement of Bancroft. Hallam, however, considers that, in that particular sermon of 1588, Bancroft "says nothing about what is commonly meant by the *jure divino* doctrine, the perpetual and indispensable government by bishops, confining himself to an assertion of the fact, and that in no strong terms." †

Dr. Blakeney, on the other hand, states that "the Presbyterians asserted the *jus divinum* of presbytery; Bancroft was the first who met this with the *jus divinum* of episcopacy; but Bancroft did not deny the validity of non-episcopal order and sacraments." ‡

The false doctrine had had what Bacon called its "modest beginning," but it had not yet met the

* Boyse on Episcopacy, pp. 13-19.

† Hallam, *Const. Hist. of Eng.*, chap. vii, p. 388, Widdleton's Amer. Edition.

‡ Blakeney on Book of Common Prayer. Third Edition, London, 1870, p. 631.

popular approval, or the assent of scholarly divines or of the church authorities.

About 1594 Richard Hooker began to issue his great work on the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, in defense of the polity of the Anglican Church. This work may be considered as marking a transition period. He strongly favors and defends episcopacy, but holds that the Church may vary its organizations, and "fully concedes the validity of presbyterian ordination." * Thus, he says: "Now, whereas hereupon some do infer that no ordination can stand, but only such as is made by bishops which have their ordination likewise by other bishops before them, till we come to the very apostles of Christ themselves; in which respect it was demanded by Beza at Poissie, 'By what authority he could administer the holy sacraments,' etc. To this we answer, that there may be sometimes very just and sufficient reason to allow ordination made without a bishop," etc.†

From 1604 we may date the rise of extreme views of the episcopacy. Laud, in that year, in the thesis which he presented when he came to take his degree of Bachelor of Divinity at Oxford, maintained that there could be no true church without bishops. As Dr. Blakeney observes: "It was reserved for Laud to make the startling and novel assertion that episcopal regime was essential, and to raise the cry in our

* Fisher, *Hist. of Ref.*, p. 334.

† Hooker, *Eccl. Pol.*, vii, 14. See also iii, 11.

churches, "*Nullus episcopus, nulla ecclesia*," "no bishop, no church." *

That Laud was reprov'd by the University of Oxford for his declaration shows that the Church and its authorities did not hold or sympathize with such views. Further proof that the Church of England did not hold such extreme views of episcopacy is found in the fact that the fifty-fifth canon, of this very year, commands that "Before all sermons, lectures, and homilies, the preachers and ministers shall move the people to join with them in prayer" for the Church of Scotland; which was a recognition of a presbyterian body as a true Church.

In the year 1618 there was another recognition of a non-episcopal body, when the king sent a number of distinguished Anglican clergymen, including the Bishop of Llandaff, Dr. Hall, afterward Bishop of Norwich, and Dr. Davenant, subsequently Bishop of Salisbury, as delegates to the Synod of Dort, where the Presbyterian Church of Holland was organized.

During the course of years, however, the injurious leaven had been working, and Laud, who had been rebuked in 1604, was in 1633 made Archbishop of Canterbury; and this man who introduced into the Anglican Church the doctrine of apostolic succession had, as primate and as the devoted friend of Charles the First, abundant opportunity to spread his false

* Blakeney, *His. Book of Com. Prayer*, Third Edition, London, 1870, p. 631.

notion. With his elevation to the primacy new vigor was given to the extreme views. His first act was to adopt more stringent rules in regard to ordination, so as to shut out Puritan preachers and lecturers. In a little while he got the convocation to go so far as to affirm even that "monarchy was of divine right." Nevertheless, the legitimacy of presbyterial ordination and the parity of the orders of bishops and presbyters were still held by the Church of England.

In 1647, Dr. Hall, Bishop of Norwich, said, in an address to the clergy of his diocese: "Blessed be God, there is no difference, in any essential point, between the Church of England and her sister Reformed Churches. We unite in every article of Christian doctrine, without the least variation, as the full and absolute agreement between their public confessions and ours testifies. The only difference between us consists in our mode of constituting the external ministry; and even with respect to this point we are of one mind, because we all profess to believe that it is not an essential of the Church (though in the opinion of many it is a matter of importance to her well-being); and we all retain a respectful and friendly opinion of each other, not seeing any reason why so small a disagreement should produce any alienation of affection among us." *

So that, even after Laud had become primate, it was held that, though the English Church was epis-

* Bishop Hall's *Irenicum*, published in 1647.

copal and the other Reformed Churches were presbyterial, they did not differ "in any essential point;" and even as to their difference as to the "mode of constituting the external ministry" the English Church and the others agreed that this matter was "not an essential of the Church," and they did not see "any reason why so small a disagreement should produce any alienation of affection." Even then the extreme views as to the necessity of episcopal government and ordination were not accepted by the Anglican Church.

Archbishop Usher, who died in 1656, preferred the episcopal system, but said: "I have ever declared my opinion to be that bishop and presbyter differ only in degree, and not in order; and, consequently, that in places where bishops cannot be had, the ordination by presbyters standeth valid." Alluding to the Reformed Churches on the Continent which had a presbyterial government, he further remarked that "For the testifying my communion with these churches (which I do love and honor as true members of the Church universal), I do profess that, with like affection, I should receive the blessed sacrament at the hands of the Dutch ministers, if I were in Holland, as I should do at the hands of the French minister if I were in Charentone."*

When Charles I., in the Isle of Wight, asked the

* *Judgment of the late Archbishop of Armagh, etc.*, by N. Bernard, London, 1657, 8vo pp. 125-127.

learned archbishop whether he found in antiquity that "presbyters alone did ordain," replied "Yes, and that he could show his majesty more, even where presbyters alone successively ordained bishops, and brought as an instance of this the presbyters of Alexandria choosing and making their own bishops from the days of Mark till Heraclas and Dionysius."

It was on this theory of the parity of the order of bishops and presbyter that Archbishop Usher proposed a scheme of moderate episcopacy "wherein the bishop, reduced to a sort of president of his college of presbyters, and differing from them only in rank, not in order (*gradu, non ordine*), should act, whether in ordination or jurisdiction, by their concurrence." *

Bishop Stillingfleet published his *Irenicum* about 1659. The object of the book was "to moderate the pretensions of the Anglican party, to which the author belonged," and to show that no form of Church government is prescribed in the sacred Scriptures. Toward the close of his discussion he remarks: "It is acknowledged by the stoutest champions for episcopacy, before these late unhappy divisions, that ordination performed by presbyters in cases of necessity is valid; which I have already shown doth evidently prove that episcopal government is not founded upon any unalterable divine right." † Such were the views of the Church of England from the Reforma-

* Hallam, *Const. Hist. of Eng.*, vol. ii, chap. ix, p. 116.

† Stillingfleet's *Irenicum*, part ii, chap. viii, sec. 7.

tion down to 1661, when the Act of Uniformity of Charles II. was passed. It was then that the words, "or hath had episcopal consecration or ordination," were added to the preface to the Ordination Service, so as to make that necessary for one to be a lawful minister in the Church of England ; but even this, it is claimed, was not intended to deny the validity of other Protestant Churches, for the very next section recognizes "the foreign Reformed Churches."

That down to this date the Anglican Church did not hold that episcopal government was essential to a true Church, that ordination by bishops was essential to a valid ministry, or that bishops were superior in order to presbyters, is practically demonstrated by the fact that the Church of England down to this time admitted into its ministry without re-ordination those who had received only presbyterial ordination. *hust*

Bishop Burnet says that "Those who came to England from the foreign churches had not been required to be ordained among us ; but now (referring to the Act of 1661) all that had not episcopal ordination were made incapable of holding any ecclesiastical benefice." *

So Bishop Fleetwood declares that this was "certainly her practice during the reigns of King James and King Charles I. and to the year 1661. We had many ministers from Scotland, from France, and from the Low Countries, who were ordained by pres-

* Burnet's *History of his Own Times*, vol. i, p. 183.

byters only, and not bishops, and they were instituted into benefices with cure, . and yet were never re-ordained, but only subscribed the articles." With this date began the triumph of extreme episcopal views. They had been working slowly, but steadily and persistently. From the idea of the English reformers that bishops and presbyters did not differ in order, the popular view gradually changed until the notion that bishops were of a higher order than presbyters generally prevailed. At first episcopacy was looked upon as not necessary to a true Church, though useful as an expedient, but at last the idea that episcopal government was of divine right and that there could be no true church without it became the prevalent view. From the liberal thought that non-episcopal churches were legitimate, and that presbyterial ordinations were valid, they passed to the narrower conception that no one could exercise clerical function without ordination by a bishop. From fraternal recognition of and affiliation with non-episcopal churches there was a change to an exclusiveness in marked contrast with the action of those who led in the Reformation in England and those who subsequently, and for generations, guided the affairs of the Church.

Such is the weakness of human nature, and such is the power of error. The false view, though uttered but occasionally and by a few at first, may at last be accepted as the truth by the many.

CHAPTER III.

WESLEY'S VIEWS ON EPISCOPACY, ORDINATION, AND
CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

THE Rev. John Wesley, M.A., a graduate of Oxford University and Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, has the honor of being the founder of Methodism, which, under various forms, has found its way around the world.

The son of a learned clergyman of the Established Church, and educated at Christ Church, Oxford, John Wesley in due time also became a clergyman of the Church of England. Convinced that the people of England needed something more than the regular clergy and the church services were doing for them, he resorted to other methods for the purpose of spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land, and, in course of time, formed numerous Methodist societies in Great Britain, and lived to see the time when his preachers penetrated the wilds of America and organized many Methodist societies beyond the Atlantic Ocean.

While Wesley's views will not be deemed binding upon his followers throughout the course of generations, yet, as the founder of Methodism, which has assumed various ecclesiastical forms, his opinions will

have value for purposes of interpretation or explanation in any historical study of Methodist polity.

Educated as he had been in a very churchly university, and reared amid extreme churchly influences, Wesley began his ministry as a High Churchman. He was, as he afterward confessed, "above measure zealous for all her rules and orders." * Referring to himself and his brother, the Rev. Charles Wesley, who was associated with him, he also admits the influence of "that poisonous mysticism with which" they "were both not a little tainted before" they "went to America," which was in 1735. †

But, though at the beginning he was a High Churchman by inheritance and training, he gradually corrected and modified his views, until at last he became extremely liberal in his opinions.

At first he thought it very improper to preach to people anywhere excepting in an ecclesiastical edifice which had been formally consecrated, but after a little while he deemed it right to preach the gospel wherever he could get the people to hear.

He thus explains how this change was brought about: "Some years since two or three clergymen of the Church of England, who were above measure zealous for all her rules and orders, were convinced that religion is not an external thing, but 'righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;' and that this

* Wesley's Works, Letter to a Friend, Amer. Ed., vol. vii, p. 299.

† Wesley's Journal, Dec. 10, 1788.

righteousness, and peace, and joy are given only to those who are justified by faith. As soon as they were convinced of these great truths, they preached them, and multitudes flocked to hear. For these reasons, and no others, real or pretended (for as yet they were strictly regular), because they preached such doctrine, and because such multitudes followed them, they were forbid to preach in the churches. Not daring to be silent, they preached elsewhere, in a school, by a river-side, or upon a mountain, and more and more sinners forsook their sins and were filled with peace and joy in believing.”*

Even then he continued to be very extreme in his views of church government. He believed in apostolic succession, the divine right of episcopacy, the doctrine that bishops were of a higher order than presbyters, and the necessity of episcopal ordination for a valid ministry.

At first he would not tolerate preaching by any one who was not a regularly ordained clergyman of the Church of England, but the pressing needs of his growing work, and the ability and success of one or two unordained men, compelled him to acknowledge that even a man who had not been regularly ordained, according to established ecclesiastical forms, might be called of God to preach. The logic of results influenced his mind, which was becoming more and more practical every day.

* Wesley's Works, Letter to a Friend, Amer. Ed., vol. vii, p. 299.

In a few years he had a large number of lay preachers, who voluntarily came to him and who obeyed him as unquestioningly as soldiers would their general. His chapels in a little while dotted England almost every-where. The growing demands of his work caused him to begin and gradually develop an organization which ultimately became a marvel of thoroughness in its adaptation to the peculiar circumstances which had arisen.

Wesley assigned each preacher to his place, and removed him at pleasure. As a single society was not strong enough to support a preacher, and as the preachers were not numerous enough to permit each society to have the exclusive service of one, a number of societies were joined together in a circuit, and the few preachers assigned to the circuit traveled from point to point, so that all received the benefit of their ministrations. Then, that the preachers, who had the qualities of earnest evangelists rather than those of settled pastors, might be kept fresh in their enthusiasm and always have an abundance of topics and sermons, they were changed at certain times from place to place, and thus grew up the Methodist itinerancy.

As it was necessary for Wesley to instruct his preachers and to receive reports from them, they came together once a year and discussed various matters of present and practical interest, and so arose the Annual Conferences of Methodism.

Wesley now found himself the head of a remark-

able organism. He was the chief among a large body of preachers. As a matter of fact they were ministers of the gospel, for they preached the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that with an efficiency, to say the least, which was not surpassed by any other body of preachers in Great Britain. But they were rated as lay preachers because they had not been ordained by the episcopal power of the Established Church, and Wesley himself so regarded them when he distinguished them from the clergy of the state Church.

Had they been ordained ministers, Wesley might have been regarded as a bishop, similar to the bishops of the Christian Church in its early day, when the presiding presbyter was called bishop in contradistinction from the other presbyters. In fact, he was a bishop, for he was an overseer or superintendent, and his preachers, with the exception of the administration of the sacraments, were practically true ministers of the gospel.

Still Wesley clung to his old views as to ecclesiastical polity, and yet the practical facts of the situation must have made a gradual but lasting impression that tended sooner or later to weaken his inherited prejudices.

Mr. Wesley's first Conference, which was held in London, began on the 25th of June, 1744, and continued five days. All his co-workers were not present at the Conference, but among those who assembled

were six clergymen of the Anglican Church, including John and Charles Wesley.

The following points were proposed for consideration : "1. What to teach ; 2. How to teach ; and, 3. What to do ; that is, how to regulate our doctrine, discipline, and practice ;" and these points were very thoroughly discussed.

Probably they did not fully comprehend all they were doing ; but, looking back to that time in the light of what has been accomplished, it is evident that they were laying the foundation of an elaborate ecclesiastical structure.

Under the head of "Points of Discipline," they considered the relation of the Methodists to the Church of England, and this led them to open the discussion on matters of discipline with a definition of the Established Church, and the following questions and answers were recorded :

" Q. 1. What is the Church of England ?

" A. According to the twentieth article the visible Church of England is the congregation of English believers, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered.

" (But the word ' Church ' is sometimes taken, in a looser sense, for ' a congregation professing to believe.' So it is taken in the twenty-sixth article, and in the first, second, and third chapters of the Revelation.) "

" Q. 2. Who is a member of the Church of England ?

“4. A believer, hearing the pure word of God preached, and partaking of the sacraments duly administered, in that Church.” *

This was broad enough to cover his own societies and also the dissenting bodies as parts of the real Church of England. That this was, probably, the intention will appear more plainly from a further definition given under a later question. After denying that they “separate from the Church,” the following question was propounded: “What then do they mean who say, ‘You separate from the Church?’” To which this reply is recorded: “We cannot tell. Perhaps they have no determinate meaning, unless by the Church they mean themselves; that is, that part of the clergy who accuse us of preaching false doctrine. And it is sure we do herein separate from them, by maintaining that which they deny.” After this it is asked: “Do you not weaken the Church?” and the answer is, “Do not they who ask this, by *the Church*, mean themselves? We do not purposely weaken any man’s hands. But accidentally we may thus far: they who come to know the truth by us will esteem such as deny it less than before. But the Church in the proper sense, the congregation of English believers, we do not weaken at all.”

This is very suggestive in many ways, but especially in this: that Mr. Wesley was losing his narrow

* Wesley’s Works, Amer. Ed., vol. v, p. 197.

idea of the Church, so that now he defined it as "the congregation of English believers," which definition, in his mind, embraced many more than those who considered themselves in actual membership in the state Church.

The last question, which was of great moment, is as follows:

"Q. 10. Do you not entail a schism on the Church? that is, Is it not probable that your hearers, after your death, will be scattered into all sects and parties; or that they will form themselves into a distinct sect?"

"A. (1.) We are persuaded the body of our hearers will even after our death remain in the Church, unless they be thrust out.

"(2.) We believe, notwithstanding, either that they will be thrust out or that they will leaven the whole Church.

"(3.) We do, and will do, all we can to prevent those consequences which are supposed likely to happen after our death.

"(4.) But we cannot with a good conscience neglect the present opportunity of saving souls while we live, for fear of consequences which may possibly or probably happen after we are dead." *

Even then the possibility or probability of the Methodists becoming a distinct Church was realized by Mr. Wesley. He believed, however, that "the body" of them would remain in the state Church,

* Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., vol. v, pp. 194-198.

unless they were "thrust out." He believed they would be thrust out or that they would "leaven the Church," but he was not to be deterred from his present work because of probable consequences in the future; that is to say, he would go on even if it would finally result in separation.

The same year another event occurred which perhaps unintentionally reveals some of the thoughts which were taking form in Wesley's mind. There was at that time a threatened invasion by the French in the interest of Charles Edward, the son of the Pretender, and a proclamation was published requiring all Roman Catholics to leave London. Now it happened that among the calumnies circulated against Wesley's followers was one to the effect that they had leanings toward papacy. In consequence of this, some of Wesley's friends urged him to write an address to the king in defense of the Methodists. Wesley wrote the address, and in it described them as "a people scattered, and peeled, and trodden under foot; traduced as inclined to popery, and consequently disaffected to his majesty," but that, on the contrary, they were "a part of the Protestant Church established in these kingdoms; they detested the fundamental doctrines of the Church of Rome; and were steadily attached to his majesty's royal person and illustrious house, and ready to obey him to the uttermost, in all things which they conceived to be agreeable to the written word of God."

In this Wesley speaks for the Methodists as a distinct body among the Protestants; at least his brother, Charles Wesley, said that this would be the natural inference, and "objected to the sending of this address *in the name of the Methodists*, because it would constitute them a sect, or at least would *seem to allow* that they were a body distinct from the national Church. He wished his brother to guard against this, and then, in the name of the Lord, to address the king. Upon further consideration the address was laid aside." *

The next year, 1745, his second Conference, which was held at Bristol, opened on the first and continued until the fifth day of August. On the third day the Conference debated points of church government, and the question asked was, "Is episcopal, presbyterian, or independent church government most agreeable to reason?" The following is the answer then given:

"The plain origin of church government seems to be this: Christ sends forth a person to preach the gospel; some of those who hear him repent and believe in Christ; they then desire him to watch over them, to build them up in faith, and to guide their souls into paths of righteousness. Here, then, is an independent congregation, subject to no pastor but their own; neither liable to be controlled, in things spiritual, by any other man or body of men

* Tyerman's *Life of John Wesley*, vol. i, p. 439; Charles Wesley's *Journal*, vol. i, p. 354.

whatsoever. But soon after, some from other parts, who were occasionally present while he was speaking in the name of the Lord, beseech him to come over and help them also. He complies, yet not till he confers with the wisest and holiest of his congregation; and with their consent appoints one who has gifts and grace to watch over his flock in his absence. If it please God to raise another flock in the new place, before he leaves them he does the same thing, appointing one whom God hath fitted for the work to watch over these souls also. In like manner, in every place where it pleases God to gather a little flock by his word, he appoints one in his absence to take the oversight of the rest, to assist them as of the ability which God giveth.

“These are deacons, or servants of the Church, and they look upon their first pastor as the common father of all these congregations, and regard him in the same light, and esteem him still as the shepherd of their souls. These congregations are not strictly independent, as they depend upon one pastor, though not upon each other.

“As these congregations increase, and the deacons grow in years and grace, they need other subordinate deacons, or helpers, in respect of whom they may be called presbyters or elders, as their father in the Lord may be called the bishop or overseer of them all.” *

In this there is not a word about episcopal ordina-

* Watson's *Life of Wesley*, Amer. Ed., 1836, p. 135.

tion or formal laying on of hands. He simply speaks of a preacher, and he recognized his lay ministers as preachers. Who can read this and fail to see that in this declaration Wesley gives a vivid picture of the Methodist organization which had grown up under him? A preacher gathers a congregation, and then one after another, until he has quite a number under his care. This is precisely what Mr. Wesley had done. Then, as he cannot be in every place at the same time, he calls to his aid other preachers to minister in his absence, and, as the work expands, junior preachers are called in to assist these seniors, and the original minister remains as the overseer of all the preachers and all the congregations. This was exactly the case with Wesley and his preachers. The assistant preachers when they begin are deacons; then, as younger men come up to assist the older and more experienced they become the deacons, and the older men, as related to the younger, become presbyters or elders. The only legitimate inference is that it had already flashed upon Mr. Wesley that Methodism had passed through what he considered the different stages of church organization: first the independent congregation, then the presbyterial association, and at last the episcopal; that his senior preachers were elders and his junior preachers were deacons, while he was a bishop—"the bishop or overseer of them all."

There may have been inconsistencies in his language and his conduct at this period and later, but, if

there were, this is not to be wondered at. It is always so in the transition state of great reformers, for the human mind does not break away abruptly from its old habits of thought and expression.

In the latter part of 1745 he was urged by his brother-in-law, the Rev. Westley Hall, who was a clergyman of the establishment, to withdraw from the Church of England. Hall appears to have alleged that the Established Church had a papal hierarchy and prelacy, that it contained things which could not be defended, and that the attitude of Wesley was inconsistent. To this Wesley on the last day of the year replied :

“ You think, first, that we undertake to defend some things which are not defensible by the word of God. You instance three, on each of which we will explain ourselves as clearly as we can.

“ 1. That the validity of our ministry depends on a succession supposed to be from the apostles, and a commission derived from the pope of Rome, and his successors and dependents.

“ We believe it would not be right for us to administer either baptism or the Lord’s Supper, unless we had a commission so to do from those bishops whom we apprehend to be in a succession from the apostles. And yet we allow these bishops are the successors of those who were dependent upon the bishop of Rome. But we would be glad to know on what reasons you believe this to be inconsistent with the word of God.

“2. That there is an outward priesthood, and consequently an outward sacrifice, ordained and offered by the bishop of Rome and his successors and dependents, in the Church of England, as vicars and vicegerents of Christ.

“We believe there is, and always was, in every Christian Church (whether dependent on the bishop of Rome or not) an outward priesthood, ordained by Jesus Christ, and an outward sacrifice offered therein by men authorized to act as ambassadors of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. On what grounds do you believe that Christ has abolished that priesthood or sacrifice?

“3. That this papal hierarchy and prelacy which still continues in the Church of England is of apostolical institution, and authorized thereby, though not by the written word.

“We believe that the threefold order of ministers (which you seem to mean by papal hierarchy and prelacy,) is not only authorized by its apostolical institutions, but also by the written word. Yet we are willing to hear and weigh whatever reasons induce you to believe to the contrary.

“You think, secondly, that we ourselves give up some things as indefensible, which are defended by the same law and authority that establishes the things above mentioned; such as are many of the laws, customs, and practices of the ecclesiastical courts.

“We allow, 1. That those laws, customs, and prac-

tices are really indefensible. 2. That there are acts of Parliament in defense of them; and also of the threefold order.

“But will you show us how it follows, either (1) that those things and these stand and fall together? or (2) that we cannot sincerely plead for the one, though we give up the other? Do you not here quite overlook one circumstance, which might be a key to our whole behavior? namely, that we no more look upon these filthy abuses which adhere to our Church as part of the building, than we look upon any filth which may adhere to the walls of Westminster Abbey as a part of that structure.

“You think, thirdly, that there are many things which we defend and practice in open contradiction to the orders of the Church of England. And this you judge to be a just exception against the sincerity of our professions to adhere to it.

“Compare what we profess with what we practice, and you will possibly be of another judgment. We profess, 1. That we will obey all the laws of that Church (such as we allow the rubrics to be, but not the customs of the ecclesiastical courts) so far as we can with a safe conscience; 2. That we will obey, with the same restriction, the bishops, as executors of those laws. But their bare will, distinct from these laws, we do not profess to obey at all.

“Now point out, What is there in our practice which is an open contradiction to these professions?

Is field preaching? Not at all. It is contrary to no law which we profess to obey. *The allowing of lay preachers?* We are not clear that this is contrary to any such law. But if it is, this is one of the exempt cases; one wherein we cannot obey with a safe conscience. Therefore, be it right or wrong on other accounts, it is, however, no just exception against our sincerity. *The rules and directions given to our societies?* which, you say, is a discipline utterly forbidden by the bishops. When and where did any bishop forbid this, and if any did, by what law? We know not either the man who ever *did* forbid, or the law by which he *could* forbid, it. The allowing persons (for we require none to communicate at the chapel) in contradiction (you think) to all those rubrics which require all to attend always on their own parish church and pastor, and to receive only at his table? Which rubrics are those? We cannot find them. And till these are produced, all that is so frequently said of parochial unity, etc., is merely a *gratis dictum*. Consequently, neither is this any just exception against the sincerity of any of our professions." *

This letter is very valuable as showing what extremely High-Church views Wesley at one time held, and yet the unprejudiced mind cannot help feeling that some of these exceedingly strong expressions are the last resort of a skilled disputant who realizes that he is being thrown upon the defensive, and that his

* Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., *Jour.*, vol. iii, pp. 262, 363.

cherished theories are in danger of destruction. Any candid person who reads it in the light of the work Wesley was doing cannot help feeling that, amid this startling enunciation of High-Church principles, there was the struggling of a mighty brain, at once conservative and yet progressive, which was striving to find the light, but which had not yet emerged from the darkness.

He says: "It would not be right to administer either baptism or the Lord's Supper" without "a commission so to do from those bishops whom we apprehend to be in a succession from the apostles," but at the same time, as though he began to doubt the strength of his position or wished it could be overturned, he says: "We would be glad to know on what reasons you believe this to be inconsistent with the word of God?" He believes in an outward priesthood, ordained by Jesus Christ, and an outward sacrifice, but, as an inquirer, he asks, "On what grounds do you believe that Christ has abolished that priesthood or sacrifice?" He believes "that the threefold order of ministers is not only authorized by its apostolical institution, but also by the written word. Yet," he adds, "we are willing to hear and weigh whatever reasons induce you to believe the contrary." He is very devoted to the Church of England, but the argument of practical necessity is carrying him so far that even if it should be discovered that lay preaching was contrary to the ecclesiastical law his conscience

would not allow him to obey. This vigorous language was the expression of one who had almost reached the turning point. He reluctantly gave up cherished traditions, but maturing judgment and practical work, as well as the abuses which he admitted did exist in the State Church, were turning his gaze from the superstitions of the dim past to the facts of the living present.

Notwithstanding the seeming strength of the High-Church expressions just quoted, Wesley, however, was making rapid progress, and the next year marked an epoch in his ecclesiastical conceptions. In that year, 1746, he set out for Bristol, and, as was his habit, read as he journeyed along the road. The author of the book he read was Lord Peter King, Lord High Chancellor of England, and a nephew of the celebrated philosopher, John Locke. The work was *An Enquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity, and Worship of the Primitive Church*. It was issued about a dozen years before Wesley was born, and the author had died just about twelve years before Wesley made this journey to Bristol. The fact that Lord King was a rigid Dissenter was very suggestive. It is at least significant of growing liberality that Wesley, the Churchman, was willing to go to King, the Dissenter, to learn something about the true government of the Christian Church.

Lord King, in his *Constitution of the Primitive Church*, says :

“Now the definition of a presbyter may be this : a person in holy orders, having thereby an *inherent right to perform the whole office of a bishop* ; but being possessed of no place or parish, not actually discharging it without the permission and consent of the bishop of a place or parish.

“But, lest this definition should seem obscure, I shall illustrate it by this following instance : as a curate has the same mission and power with the minister whose place he supplies, yet, being not the minister of that place, he cannot perform there any acts of his ministerial function without leave from the minister thereof ; so a presbyter has the same order and power with a bishop whom he assisted in his cure, yet, being not the bishop or minister of that cure, he could not there perform any part of his pastoral office without the permission of the bishop thereof ; so that what we generally render bishops, priests, and deacons would be more intelligible in our tongue if we did express it by rectors, vicars, and deacons : by rectors understanding the bishops, and by vicars the presbyters ; the former being the actual incumbents of a place, and the latter curates or assistants, and so different in degree but yet *equal in order*.

“Now this is what I understand by a presbyter, for the confirmation of which these two things are to be proved :

“I. That the presbyters were the bishops’ curates

and assistants, and so inferior to them in the actual exercise of their ecclesiastical commission.

“ II. That yet, notwithstanding, they *had the same inherent right with the bishops*, and so were not a distinct specific order from them. Or more briefly thus :

“ 1. That the presbyters were different from the bishops *in gradu*, or in degree, but yet

“ 2. They were equal to them *in ordine*, or in order. .

“ Though a presbyter, by his ordination, *had as ample an inherent right and power to discharge all clerical offices as any bishop in the world had*, yet peace, unity, and order obliged him not to invade that part of God's Church which was committed to another man's care, without that man's approbation and consent.

“ But though the presbyters were thus different from the bishops in degree, yet they were of the *very same specific order with them*, having the *same inherent right to perform those ecclesiastical offices which the bishop did*.

“ As for ordination, I find but little said of this in antiquity ; yet, as little as there is, *there are clearer proofs of the presbyters' ordaining* than there are of their administering the Lord's Supper. ‘ All power and grace,’ saith Firmilian, ‘ is constituted in the Church, where *seniors preside*, who have the power of baptizing, confirming, and *ordaining*’ (*Apud Cyprian, Epist.*, 75, §6, p. 237).

“What these seniors were will be best understood by a parallel place in Tertullian; for that place in Tertullian and this in Firmilian are usually cited to expound one another by most learned men, as by the most learned Dr. Cave (*Primitive Christianity*, part 3, c. 5, p. 379) and others. Now the passage in Tertullian is this: In the ecclesiastical courts ‘approved elders preside’ (*Apol.*, c. 39, p. 709). Now by these approved elders bishops and presbyters must necessarily be understood, because Tertullian speaks here of the discipline exerted in one particular church or parish, in which there was but one bishop; and if only he had presided, then there could not have been elders in the plural number; but, there being many elders, to make out their number we must add the presbyters to the bishop, who also presided with him, as we shall show in another place. Now the same that presided in church consistories, the same also ordained; presbyters, as well as bishops, ordained. And as in those churches where there were presbyters both they and the bishop presided together, so also they ordained together, both laying on their hands in ordination, as St. Timothy was ordained by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery (1 Tim. iv, 14); that is, by the hands of the bishop and presbyters of that parish where he was ordained, as is the constant signification of the word presbytery in all the writings of the ancients.

“Now, then, if the presbyters could supply the place of an absent bishop, and in general discharge all those offices to which a bishop had been obliged if he had been present, it naturally follows that the presbyters could discharge every particular act and part thereof. If I should say such an one has all the senses of a man, and yet also assert he cannot see, I should be judged a self-contradictor in that assertion ; for in affirming that he had all the human senses I also affirmed that he saw, because seeing is one of those senses ; for whatsoever is affirmed of a universal is also affirmed of every one of its particulars. So when the fathers say that the *presbyters performed the whole office of the bishop* it naturally ensues that they confirmed, *ordained*, baptized, etc., because those are particulars of that universal.

“But now, from the whole, we may collect a solid argument for *the equality of presbyters* with bishops as to order ; for if *a presbyter did all a bishop did*, what difference was there between them ? A bishop preached, baptized, and confirmed—so did a presbyter. A bishop excommunicated, absolved, and ordained—so did a presbyter. Whatsoever a bishop did, the same did a presbyter ; the particular acts of their office were the same ; the only difference that was between them was in degree, but this proves *there was none at all in order*.

“2. That *bishops and presbyters were of the same order* appears also from that originally they had one

and the same name, each of them being indifferently called bishops or presbyters.

“ Thus, on the one hand, the titles of presbyters are given unto bishops ; as Irenæus, in his synodical epistle, twice calls Anicetus, Pius, Hogynus, Telesporus, and Xistus, bishops of Rome, *πρεσβύτεροι*, or presbyters (*Apud Euseb.*, lib. 5, c. 24, p. 193). And those bishops who derived their succession immediately from the apostles he calls the presbyters in the Church (lib. 4, c. 43, p. 277) ; and whom Clemens Alexandrius in one line calls the bishop of a certain city not far from Ephesus, a few lines after he calls the presbyter (*Apud Euseb.*, lib. 5, c. 24, p. 193).

“ And, on the other hand, the titles of bishops are ascribed to presbyters, as one of the discretive appellations of a bishop is pastor. Yet Cyprian also calls his presbyters the pastors of the flock (Epis. ii, sec. 1, p. 33). Another was that of president, or one set over the people. Yet Cyprian also calls his presbyters presidents, or set over the people (Epis. ii, sec. 2, p. 33). The bishops were also called rectors or rulers. So Origen calls the presbyters the governors of the people (Comment in Matt., vol. i, p. 246). And we find both bishops and presbyters included under the common name of presidents or prelates, by St. Cyprian, in this his exhortation to Pomponius : ‘ And if all must observe the divine discipline, how much more must the presidents and deacons do it, who by their conversation and manners must

yield a good example to others' (*Epis.* lxii, sec. 2, p. 169).

"Now if the same appellation of a thing be a good proof for the identity of its nature, then bishops and presbyters must be of the same order, because they had the same names and titles. Suppose it was disputed whether a parson and lecturer were of the same order, would not this sufficiently prove the affirmative? That though for some accidental respects they might be distinguished in their appellations, yet originally and frequently they were called by one and the same name? The same it is in this case; though for some contingent and adventitious reasons, bishops and presbyters were discriminated in their titles, yet originally they were always, and afterward sometimes, called by one and the same appellation, and, therefore, we may justly deem them to be *one and the same order*.

"But if this reason be not thought cogent enough, the third and last will unquestionably put all out of doubt, and most clearly evince the identity or sameness of bishops and presbyters as to order; and that is, that it is expressly said by the ancients that there were but two distinct ecclesiastical orders, namely, bishops and deacons, or presbyters and deacons; and if there were but these two, presbyters cannot be distinct from bishops, for then there would be three. Now that there were but two orders, namely, bishops and deacons, is plain from that golden an-

cient remains of Clemens Romanus, wherein he thus writes: 'In the country and cities where the apostles preached they ordained their first converts for bishops and deacons over those who should believe.' Nor were these orders new, for many ages past it was thus prophesied concerning bishops and deacons: 'I will appoint their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith' (*Epis. i, ad Corinth.*, p. 54). This place of Scripture which is here quoted is in Isa. lx, 17: 'I will make thine officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness.' Whether it is rightly applied is not my business to determine. What I observe from hence is that there were but two orders instituted by the apostles, namely, bishops and deacons, which Clemens supposes were prophetically promised long before; and this is more evidently asserted in another passage of the said Clemens a little after, where he says that 'the apostles foreknew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that contention would arise about the name of episcopacy, and, therefore, being endued with a perfect foreknowledge, appointed the aforesaid officers, namely, bishops and deacons, and left the manner of their succession described, so that when they died other approved men might succeed them and perform their office' (*Epis. i, ad Corinth.*, p. 57). So that there were only the two orders of bishops and deacons instituted by the apostles; and if they ordained but those two, I think no one had ever a commission to add a

third or to split one into two, as must be done if we separate the order of presbyters from the order of bishops." *

Such were some of the views and arguments which Wesley considered on his way to Bristol, and so far-reaching was the result of this perusal that it is well for the student of Wesley's career to have some of the very words of the author before him, and therefore the preceding extract has been given.

The churchly Wesley, with his ideas of apostolic succession, episcopal ordination, and three clerical orders, must have been astounded at Lord King's assertion that bishops and presbyters were not two distinct orders but "one and the same order;" that "presbyters performed the whole office of the bishop," doing "all a bishop did;" that presbyters "had the same inherent right to perform those ecclesiastical offices which the bishop did," and that "there are clearer proofs of the presbyters' ordaining than there are of their administering the Lord's Supper;" and he must have been overwhelmed by the evidence adduced, for he made the following entry in his Journal: "I set out for Bristol. On the road I read over Lord King's account of the Primitive Church. In spite of the vehement prejudice of my education, I was ready to believe that this was a fair and impartial draught; but if so it would follow that bishops and presbyters are (essentially) of one order, and that, originally,

* King's *Primitive Church*. London, 1839, pp. 45-60.

every Christian congregation was a church independent of all others.” *

This marks an epoch in Wesley’s ecclesiastical views, and from this time he believed “that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain.” †

It has been asserted that Wesley never gave up the idea of a higher order episcopacy, and never admitted that presbyters had the same right to ordain as bishops, until he was passed eighty years of age and was in his dotage. But the fact is, first, that at eighty and later he was an exceedingly active man, and possessed of remarkable strength of intellect; and, second, that when he drew the inference from his reading of Lord King’s book “that bishops and presbyters are (essentially) of one order” he was only forty-three years of age, and consequently in the youth of his prime.

Previous facts, such as have already been suggested, were changing Wesley’s spirit of exclusiveness even before his reading of King’s *Primitive Church*. Up to a late date he had found his associations almost entirely with the Methodists and with clergymen of the Church of England, a number of whom co-operated with him in his work. He was rather an exclusive churchman, notwithstanding his supposed irregularities in preaching in unconsecrated places,

* Wesley’s Journal, January 13, 1746.

† Letter to Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and Methodists in America.

gathering societies, and employing lay preachers. But now a change takes place, and he becomes more liberal in spirit and in his actions toward those of his countrymen who were separated from the Establishment. As Tyerman puts it, "Wesley had chiefly lived within the State Church inclosure," but after becoming "a convert to the principles of Lord King he overstepped the enchanted circle, and thought it no disgrace to commune and mingle with Dissenters." * The fact is, however, that nearly four months before he read Lord King's book he called (September 9, 1745) on the celebrated Dr. Doddridge, who was pastor of a Dissenting congregation at Northampton, and the principal of an academy for the education of candidates for the ministry of the Dissenting body, and during this visit Wesley addressed Doddridge's students. The entry Mr. Wesley made in his Journal of this event is as follows: "I left London, and the next morning called on Dr. Doddridge at Northampton. It was about the hour when he was accustomed to expound a portion of Scripture to the young gentlemen under his care. He desired me to take his place. It may be the seed was not altogether sown in vain." †

Desiring to construct a course of study for his preachers, Wesley wrote to this distinguished minister asking him to suggest suitable works on various sub-

* Tyerman's *Life of Wesley*, vol. i, p. 515.

† Wesley's Works, Journal, Amer. Ed., vol. iii, p. 350.

jects. On March 15, 1746, Dr. Doddridge wrote explaining and regretting delay. On the 18th of the following June he wrote a long letter giving the desired list of books. Even as early as the 1st of February, 1740, Wesley, while still devoted to the State Church and resenting the intimation that he had become a Dissenter, seems to feel that devout Dissenters from the State Church were to be preferred to the irreligious people who deemed it their chief virtue that they conformed to the external requirements of the Establishment.

In his Journal of the above date is the following record: "The ordinary of Newgate came to me and, with much vehemence, told me he was sorry I should turn Dissenter from the Church of England. I told him, if it was so, I did not know it; at which he seemed a little surprised, and offered something by way of proof, but which needed not a reply.

"Our twentieth Article defines a true church a 'congregation of faithful people wherein the true word of God is preached and the sacraments duly administered.' According to this account the Church of England is that body of faithful people or holy believers, in England, among whom the pure word of God is preached and the sacraments duly administered. Who then are the worst Dissenters from this Church? 1. Unholy men of all kinds; swearers, Sabbath-breakers, drunkards, fighters, whoremongers, liars, revilers, evil speakers; the passionate, the gay, the lovers of

money, the lovers of dress or of praise, the lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God—all these are Dissenters of the highest sort, continually striking at the root of the Church, and themselves belonging in truth to no church, but to the synagogue of Satan. 2. Men unsound in the faith; those who deny the Scripture of truth; those who deny the Lord that bought them; those who deny justification by faith alone, or the present salvation which is by faith—these also are Dissenters of a very high kind, for they likewise strike at the foundation, and were their principles universally to obtain there could be no true church upon earth. Lastly, those who unduly administer the sacraments; who (to instance but in one point) administer the Lord's Supper to such as have neither the power nor the form of godliness. These too are gross Dissenters from the Church of England, and should not cast the first stone at others." *

Even if he was a High Churchman, he had gotten beyond believing that there was any saving power in the sacraments for the man who continued in sin. The logic of these principles would sooner or later lead him to see that Dissenting bodies might be true churches, and force upon him the thought that, according to the Article from which he quoted, his own societies were true churches, for they contained "faithful people," and in their congregations "the true word of God" was preached, and even the sacraments were

* Wesley's Works, Journal, Amer. Ed., vol. iii, p. 177.

administered to these people by John and Charles Wesley and John Fletcher.*

The perusal of Lord King's work fixed his views to a great extent, but his mind had been steadily moving toward the point where it could be settled. As Watson remarks: "The truth is, that Lord King came in only to confirm him in views which he had for some time begun to entertain; and they were such as show that though he was a Church of England man as to affection, which was strong and sincere as far as its doctrines and its liturgy were concerned, and though he regarded it with great deference as a legal institution, yet in respect of its ecclesiastical *polity* he was even then very free in his opinions."†

King helped to precipitate the sediment of error and to produce mental clearness, and his opinion as to the parity of bishops and presbyters and the right of presbyters to ordain became the key to his future theories and practice.

About four months after he was impressed by King's facts and arguments, he held his third Conference. It convened on the 13th of May, 1746, and the following extract will show that the propriety of formally ordaining the preachers was in the mind of the preachers and their "bishop or overseer." It is as follows:

* Tyerman's *Life of Wesley*, vol. i, p. 353; ii, p. 263.

† Watson's *Life of Wesley*, Amer. Ed., pp. 134, 135.

“ Q. Why do we not use more form and solemnity in receiving a new laborer?

“ A. We purposely decline it: 1. Because there is something of stateliness in it. 2. Because we would not make haste. We desire barely to follow Providence, as it gradually opens.” *

This evidently refers to the full form of ordination, and it will be noticed that there is no confession of conscious lack of authority to ordain, but, on the contrary, it suggests that though they are not in haste they look forward to a time when the Methodist preachers would or might be ordained by Wesley, assisted, it may be, by others representing the Conference.

It is a mistake to suppose that Wesley sent out his preachers without any formality. It is claimed, indeed, that the form he did use had the very essence of ministerial ordination. Thus Watson observes :

“ It has been generally supposed that Mr. Wesley did not consider his appointment of preachers as an *ordination* to the ministry; but only as an irregular employment of laymen in the spiritual office of merely expounding the Scriptures in a case of moral necessity. This is not correct. They were not appointed to expound, or preach merely, but were solemnly set apart to the pastoral office; nor were they regarded by him as *laymen* except when in common parlance

* Tyerman's *Wesley*, vol. lii, pp. 510, 511.

they were distinguished from the clergy of the Church.” *

Tyerman remarks that “his usual mode of *setting apart or ordaining* to the ministry consisted of a most rigid examination of the ministerial candidate on the three points: Has he grace? Has he gifts? Has he fruit? preceded by fasting and prayer; and followed by official and authoritative appointment to ministerial work. For the present, the form of laying on of hands was not employed; but it was thought of and was discussed.” † He never allowed any one to officiate as one of his preachers who had not been formally recognized, in some such manner as that above mentioned. Still we are not prepared to call that a full ordination, for Wesley did not give his preachers in those early days power to administer the sacraments. The members of his societies continued to receive the sacraments from John and Charles Wesley, ‡ and other clergymen of the Established Church who co-operated with Mr. Wesley in the evangelical movement, or they went to the parish church and received the sacraments at the hands of the incumbent.

An interesting incident in this connection is that related of the Rev. John Fletcher, another clergyman of the Anglican Church, who, as soon as he was ordained, went to assist Mr. Wesley in this very

* Watson's Works, vol. v, p. 148.

† Tyerman's *Life of Wesley*, vol. i, p. 510.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

work. Wesley remarks that, "It was in the year 1757 that he (Fletcher) was ordained both deacon and priest. He was ordained at Whitehall; and the same day, being informed that I had no one to assist me at West Street Chapel, he came away as soon as ever the ordination was over, and assisted me in the administration of the Lord's Supper." *

Whether Wesley's preachers should or should not have had the right to administer the sacraments is not the question now before us. That Wesley believed he had the power to give them that right is already exceedingly plain. He was a presbyter, and he now held that presbyters and bishops were the same order, and, therefore, being the same order, had the same right to ordain, and the extract from the Minutes of the Conference of 1746 makes manifest that he and his preachers were meditating the question of full ordination as a possibility, and were patiently waiting the providential indications as to the time when it would to them seem proper. With him it had become not a question of power, but of prudence, and that the Methodist preachers at an early day solicited ordination is a well-known fact of history.†

A year after this, namely, 1747, the Minutes of the

* Wesley's *Life of Fletcher*, Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., vol. vi, p. 435.

† Tyerman's *Life of Wesley*, iii, p. 444.

Conference contain the following questions and answers :

“ Q. Does a Church in the New Testament always mean a single congregation ?

“ A. We believe it does ; we do not recollect any instance to the contrary.

“ Q. What instance or ground is there then in the New Testament for a national Church ?

“ A. We know none at all ; we apprehend it to be a merely political institution.

“ Q. Are the three orders of bishops, priests, and deacons plainly described in the New Testament ?

“ A. We think they are, and believe they generally obtained in the Church of the apostolic age.

“ Q. But are you assured that God designed the same plan should obtain in all churches, throughout all ages ?

“ A. We are not assured of it, because we do not know it is asserted in Holy Writ.

“ Q. If the plan were essential to a Christian Church, what must become of all foreign Reformed Churches ?

“ A. It would follow they are no part of the Church of Christ ; a consequence full of shocking absurdity.

“ Q. In what age was the divine right of episcopacy first asserted in England ?

“ A. About the middle of Queen Elizabeth’s reign : till then all the bishops and clergy in England con-

tinually allowed, and joined in, the ministrations of those who were not episcopally ordained.

“Q. Must there not be numberless accidental variations in the government of various churches?

“A. There must, in the nature of things. As God variously dispenses his gifts of nature, providence, and grace, both the offices themselves and the officers in each ought to be varied from time to time.

“Q. Why is it that there is no determinate plan of Church government appointed in Scripture?

“A. Without doubt because the wisdom of God had a regard to that necessary variety.

“Q. Was there any thought of uniformity in the government of all churches until the time of Constantine?

“A. It is certain there was not, nor would there have been then had men consulted the word of God only.”*

Among other things this shows that Wesley no longer had his old reverence for a *national* Church. He finds no ground in the New Testament for a State Church, and apprehends that it is “merely a political institution.” He is not “assured that God designed the same plan of polity should obtain in all churches, throughout all ages,” because he does not find it so asserted in Holy Writ. He considers that there must be “numberless accidental varieties in the government of various churches;” that this must be

* Watson's *Life of Wesley*, Amer. Ed., pp. 137, 138.

“in the nature of things,” “for as God variously dispenses his gifts of nature, providence, and grace, both the offices themselves and the officers in each ought to be varied from time to time,” and that it was because “the wisdom of God had a regard to this necessary variety” that there “is no determinate plan of Church government appointed in Scripture.” He finds further that there was no “thought of uniformity in the government of all churches until the time of Constantine,” and that there would not have been then, “had men consulted the word of God only.” Coming down to the English Church he declares that the “divine right of episcopacy” was not asserted in England until “about the middle of Queen Elizabeth’s reign,” and that “till then all the bishops and clergy in England continually allowed, and joined in, the ministrations of those who were not episcopally ordained.”

He sees the logic of considering that episcopal government was “essential to a Christian Church,” for, according to this, it would follow that “all the foreign Reformed Churches” “are no parts of the Church of Christ,” which he considers “a consequence full of shocking absurdity.”

He is no longer a High Churchman. With him episcopacy is simply a matter of expediency, and bodies without episcopal ordination are true churches and have a valid ministry. He still clings to the State Church, but he could not see any scriptural

authority for a national Church, and, as with him the Bible was the final court of appeal, the Church of England was "a merely political institution." It is true that he says he thinks "the three orders of bishops, priests, and deacons" are "plainly described in the New Testament," and believes "they generally obtained in the churches of the apostolic age;" but his use of the phrase "three orders" is probably through force of long habit, for it was only the year before that he had agreed with Lord King that presbyters and bishops were "*the same order*," and, consequently, he could only have two orders. He had not yet fully adjusted his expressions to his newly accepted theory. Probably all that he means to say is that the three names, "bishops, priests, and deacons," are found in the New Testament and the apostolic age. In the light of what he tells us as to the effect of King's views upon his mind, it is certain that he cannot mean that bishops and presbyters are distinct clerical orders, and that a bishop is superior in order to the presbyter. His own words are that from the time he read Lord King he was "convinced" "that bishops and presbyters are the same order."

Most assuredly in one year a marked advance has been made, and, to see clearly what a great change has taken place, one need but contrast these views with those he declared in his letter of only a little over a year before (December 30, 1745) when he believed in apostolic succession, in a "threefold order

of ministers” “not only authorized by its apostolical institution, but also by the written word,” in “an outward sacrifice,” and in the illegality of administering sacraments by any excepting those “who had a commission so to do from those bishops whom” he apprehended “to be in succession from the apostles.”

That we may have the chronology of those steps before us, let us recall the fact that it was at his second Conference, held at Bristol, in August of 1745, that he gives his ideas of the origin of the different forms of church government, and so phrases it that the reader is impressed with the thought that Wesley is beginning to feel that he is a bishop—and that his senior and junior preachers are presbyters and deacons. On the last day of this year he writes to his brother-in-law, giving his belief in High-Church ideas, but asking for evidence to overturn this belief. A few days after this, in January, 1746, he becomes acquainted with Lord King’s conception of church government, and concludes that presbyters and bishops are the same order, and that presbyters have the same right to ordain. Less than three months after this, namely, May 13, 1746, he broaches the subject of ordination in his Conference, explaining why the reception or setting apart of the preachers has not been more formal, and intimating that the full form of ordination may yet be used. In the Conference held the next year, 1747, in London, the question of church government is quite fully discussed; he denies that

any form of Church government is of divine authority and binding forever; denies that episcopal ordination is necessary for a valid ministry, and recognizes as true Christian Churches those that are without an episcopal government. Such is the ecclesiastical evolution which appears to have taken place in less than two years. He was now about forty-four years of age; so that it is not true, as some would have it understood, that he did not adopt such views until he was an octogenarian with enfeebled powers.

It is probable that after reading King's *Primitive Church* he read Stillingfleet's *Irenicum*. In his comparison of the views of these learned authors he must have been struck with a decided similarity between the views of the Dissenter and those of the Churchman, and the latter seems to have had almost as great influence upon him as the former.

On the 24th of September, 1755, after stating the reasons for separation urged, as he says, by those who "have weighed the point long and deeply, with earnest and continued prayer," he remarks: "I will freely acknowledge that I cannot answer these arguments to my own satisfaction. So that my conclusion, which I cannot yet give up—that it is lawful to continue in the Church—stands, I know not how, almost without any premises that are to bear its weight." * So that at this period he had reached a point where

* Wesley's Works, Letter to Rev. Mr. Walker, Amer. Ed., vol. vii, p. 274.

he was compelled to acknowledge his inability to satisfactorily meet the arguments advanced in favor of separating from the Established Church, though he continues to adhere, and deems it "lawful to continue in the Church."

A letter which Mr. Wesley wrote on the 3d of July, 1756, when he was fifty-three years of age, to the Rev. Mr. Clarke, of Hollymount, a clergyman of the Established Church, shows us the effect Stillingfleet had on him, and also how his views were steadily maturing. In this he says :

"My general proposition, you may please to remember, is this : All the children of God may unite in love, notwithstanding difference in opinions or worship.

"From this persuasion, whenever I meet with any whom I have reason to believe children of God, I do not ask of him with whom I would unite in love (never at the entrance upon our conversation, seldom till we are a little acquainted), 'Do you agree with my opinions and mode of worship, particularly with regard to church government, baptism, and the Lord's Supper?' I 'let all these stand by' till we begin to know and have confirmed our love to each other. Then may come 'a more convenient season' for entering into controversy. My only question at present is, 'Is thy heart right?' As to my own judgment, I still believe 'the episcopal form of Church government to be scriptural and apostolical.' I mean, well agreeing with the practice and writings of the apos-

tles. But that it is *prescribed* in Scripture I do not believe. This opinion, which I once zealously espoused, I have been heartily ashamed of, ever since I read Bishop Stillingfleet's *Irenicon*. I think he has unanswerably proved that 'neither Christ nor his apostles *prescribe* any particular form of Church government; and that the plea of *divine right* for diocesan episcopacy was never heard of in the primitive Church.'

"But, were it otherwise, I should still call these 'smaller points' than the 'loving God and all mankind;' and could any man answer those questions, 'Dost thou believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. God over all, blessed forever?' (which indeed no Arian or semi-Arian, and much less Socinian, can do.) 'Is God the center of thy soul? the sum of all thy desires? Art thou more afraid of displeasing God than of either death or hell?' which no wicked man **can** possibly do; none who is not a real child of God: if, I say, a man could answer these in the affirmative, I would gladly give him my hand.

"As to heresy and schism, I cannot find one text in the Bible where they are taken in the modern sense. I remember no one Scripture wherein *heresy* signifies 'error in opinion,' whether fundamental or not; nor any wherein *schism* signifies a 'separation from the Church,' whether with cause or without. I wish, sir, you would reconsider this point, and review the Scriptures wherein those terms occur.

“Yet I would take some pains to recover any one from error, or to reconcile him to our Church. I mean to the Church of England, from which I do not separate yet, and probably never shall. The little church, in the vulgar sense of the word, which I occasionally mentioned at Holy Mount, is that wherein I read prayers, and preach, and administer the sacrament every Sunday when I am in London. But I would take much more pains to recover any one from sin. One who lives and dies in error, or in dissent from our Church, may yet be saved; but one who lives and dies in sin must perish. O, sir, let us bend our main force against this, against all sin, both in ourselves and them that hear us. I would to God we could all agree both in opinions and outward worship; but, if this cannot be, may we not agree in being holy, as he that hath called us is holy, both in heart and in all manner of conversation? This is the great desire of, reverend sir, your very humble servant.” *

King taught him that presbyters and bishops were not different in order, but the same order. Stillingfleet convinces him that there is no “divine right for diocesan episcopacy,” and that no “particular form of church government” was prescribed either by Christ or his apostles, and he is “heartily ashamed” that he ever “zealously espoused” the contrary. Going further, and taking the Bible as authority in regard to

* Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., vol. vii, p. 284, 285.

the meaning of the term, he evidently is unwilling to call a "separation from the Church" a schism.

Hence he would not call the Dissenters from the Church of England schismatics. And yet this is the man whom some to-day are ready to refer to as though he despised Dissenters. He still believes in "the episcopal form of Church government" as "scriptural and apostolical" in the sense that it agrees well, or is not out of harmony, "with the practice and writings of the apostles," but not "that it is *prescribed* in Scripture." He has reached a point where the important matter, according to his judgment, is not agreeing "in opinions and outward worship," though this would be desirable, but agreeing "in holiness." It is a good thing to convert a man from an erroneous opinion or to reconcile him to the Church, but the vital thing is to save him from sin; for one who has an erroneous opinion or who dissents from the Church may be saved, "but one who lives and dies in sin must perish." He maintains that "all the children of God may unite in love, notwithstanding difference in opinions or form of worship," and he gladly gives his hand to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the advancing views of one who believes more in the practical purposes than in the accidents of ecclesiastical organization, and who is more concerned about the inner spiritual life than the external form. It will also be observed that he has begun to speak of his chapel, or

preaching-place, where he read prayers, preached, and administered the sacraments every Sunday when he was in London, as a church. This also is significant. About two months later he wrote another letter to the same clergyman, the burden of whose correspondence seems to have been about heresy and schism. Mr. Wesley in this letter of September 10, 1756, again gives his explanation of schism and heresy, and says :

“I well know heresy is vulgarly defined, ‘a false opinion touching some necessary article of faith;’ and schism, ‘a causeless separation from the true Church.’ But I keep to my Bible, as our Church in the sixth article teaches me to do. Therefore, I cannot take schism for a separation from a Church, true or false, because I cannot find it is ever so taken in Scripture. The first time I read the term there is 1 Cor. 1; I meet with it again, chap. xi, 18. But it is plain, by schisms in both places is meant, not any separation from the Church, but uncharitable divisions in it. For the Corinthians continued to be one Church; and, notwithstanding all their strife and contention, there was no separation of any one party from the rest with regard to external communion. It is in the same sense the word is used, chap. xii, 25. And these are the only places in the New Testament where it occurs. Therefore, the indulging any unkind temper toward our fellow-Christians is the true scriptural schism.

“Indeed, both heresies (which are also works of

the flesh, and consequently damnable, if not repented of) and schisms are here mentioned by the apostle in very near the same sense, unless by schisms be meant those inward animosities which occasioned heresies, that is, outward divisions and parties. So that while one said, 'I am of Paul; another, I am of Apollos;,' this implied both schism and heresy. So wonderfully have later ages distorted the words heresy and schism from their scriptural meaning! Heresy is not in all the Bible taken for 'an error in fundamentals,' or in any thing else; nor schism for any separation made from the outward communion of others. Therefore, both heresy and schism, in the modern sense of the words, are sins that the Scripture knows nothing of." *

The question of the possible separation of the Methodists, or rather of Wesley, from the State Church was exciting much attention, and, no doubt, Wesley himself was compelled to consider the question; and it is evident from his definition of schism that he would not have deemed such a separation a schismatic movement.

In the same letter to this English clergyman Mr. Wesley meets points in relation to the form of episcopal government possessed by the Established Church. He says: "Concerning diocesan episcopacy there are several questions I should be glad to have answered: 1. Where is it prescribed in Scripture? How does it appear that the apostles settled it in all the churches

* Wesley's Works, Letter to the Rev. Mr. Clarke, Amer. Ed., p. 286.

they planted? How does it appear that they settled it in any as to make it of perpetual obligation? It is allowed, 'Christ and his apostles did put the churches under some form of government or other;' but (1) did they put all churches under the same precise form? If they did, (2) can we prove this to be the very same which now remains in the Church of England?" *

It is very evident what answer Mr. Wesley would give to these questions. They suggest their own answers, and show that he continues to hold the views before expressed. He has reached a point where he now knows that it cannot be proved that the apostles established a diocesan episcopacy in all the churches, or in any, or that they made any form of church government of perpetual obligation. He therefore put the clergyman on the track of convincing himself by compelling him to adduce the evidence in favor of his notion of apostolic episcopacy.

This does not look like belief in the necessity of such an episcopal government as was at that day found in the Church of England, and the last question he asks suggests the thought that he did not believe that the form of government in the Anglican Church was precisely the form of polity which existed in the apostolic Church.

About six years later, on February 19, 1761, when

* Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., vol. vii, p. 286.

Wesley had almost attained the mature age of fifty-eight, he wrote for the London *Chronicle* an answer to a Romish tract entitled *A Caveat Against the Methodists*. In this article he says: "I deny that the Romish 'bishops came down by *uninterrupted* succession from the apostles. I never could see it proved; and I am persuaded I never shall." *

Of course, if he did not believe in the "uninterrupted succession from the apostles" in the Church of Rome, he did not believe in any such succession in the Church of England. Later in life, in a letter to his brother, the Rev. Charles Wesley, he said: "The uninterrupted succession I know to be a fable, which no man ever did or can prove." †

A few months later, under date of April 10, 1761, in "A Letter to a Friend," Mr. Wesley answers certain questions which had been propounded to said friend in regard to Mr. Wesley and his clerical helpers, who were clergymen of the Church of England. In the extract, to follow, he quotes the charge that they considered it lawful for men to preach who were without episcopal ordination, and refers to the fact that they gathered congregations here and there throughout the country. In the letter Mr. Wesley says: "I answer, First, they do gather congregations every-where, and exercise their ministerial office therein. But this is not contrary to any restraint which

* Wesley's Works, Journal, Amer. Ed., vol. iv, p. 90.

† *Methodist Magazine*, 1786, p. 50.

was laid upon them at their ordination ; for they were not ordained to serve any particular parish. And it is remarkable that Lincoln College, (of which Wesley had been a fellow), was founded *ad propagandam Christianam fidem, et extirpandas hæreses* [for the propagation of the Christian faith, and to extirpate heresies]. But were it otherwise, suppose a parish minister to be either ignorant or negligent of his duty, and one of his flock adjures me, for Christ's sake, to tell him what he must do to be saved ; was it ever the design of our Church that I should refuse to do it because he is not of my parish ? 'Secondly, they maintain it lawful for men to preach who are not episcopally ordained.' In some circumstances they do ; particularly where thousands are rushing into destruction, and those who are ordained, and appointed to watch over them, neither care for nor know how to help them. 'But hereby they contradict the twenty-third article, to which they have subscribed.' They subscribed it in the simplicity of their hearts, when they firmly believed none but episcopal ordination valid. But Bishop Stillingfleet has since convinced them this was an entire mistake. 'Thirdly, they disclaim all right in the bishops to control them in any of these matters.' In every point of an indifferent nature they obey the bishops, for conscience' sake ; but they think episcopal authority cannot reverse what is fixed by divine authority. Yet they are determined never to renounce communion with

the Church, unless they are cast out headlong. If it be said, 'Nay, but if I varied from the Church at all, I would throw off my gown and be a professed Dissenter'—What! would you profess to dissent when you did not? If you would, they dare not do it. They love the Church, and therefore keep to all her doctrine and rules as far as possibly they can; and if they vary at all, it shall not be a hair's breadth farther than they cannot help. 'Fourthly, these principles they industriously propagate among their followers.' Indeed they do not; the bulk of their followers know just nothing of the matter. They industriously propagate among them nothing but inward and outward holiness." * In this letter Mr. Wesley is speaking not for himself alone, but also for the body of episcopally ordained clergymen who had joined him in his work, and he answers the charges, indicated in the extract, which have been made against them.

They still belong to the Established Church, and have no purpose to separate from it, but they do not believe that episcopal ordination is essential to the preaching of the Gospel. If Mr. Wesley had been answering for himself alone, the probability is that he would have put some points even more strongly than he did; but he is replying for others as well as himself, and among the others was included his brother Charles, who was still a tolerably good churchman,

* Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., vol. vii, p. 301.

and frequently was shocked by the doings and sayings of his more progressive brother.

As the Rev. Charles Wesley is sometimes quoted as a rigid High Churchman, and as no qualification accompanies the statement, it may be well just here to refer to some of his methods. When Charles Wesley was in London, "he preached during church hours every Sabbath, and indulged the societies with a weekly sacrament at their own places of worship, so that they had no opportunity of attending their several churches, nor any motive to attend them. He conducted divine worship, indeed, according to the order of the Church of England, except that he used extemporary prayer and sung his own beautiful hymns; but he and the society had no more connection with the Established Church than any Dissenting minister and congregation had. He was under no episcopal control; the chapels in which he officiated were licensed by no bishop; and the clergy in whose parishes those chapels were situated were never consulted as to the time and manner of divine service. The uneasiness which frequently arose in some of the country societies took its origin in part from this state of things. They wished to be upon an equality with their metropolitan brethren, and they were never satisfied, either during the life-time of the Wesleys, or after their death, till this was conceded to them."* This is a fact to which those who claim that Charles

* Jackson's *Life of Charles Wesley*, pp. 426, 427.

Wesley was so devoted to the regularity of the English Church should not close their eyes. He would not go quite as far as his brother in some things, but he is open to the same charge of irregularity and inconsistency ; but he should not be severely blamed for either. He was irregular in some matters because of the practical necessities which existed, and his inconsistencies were perfectly natural in view of present demands and previous education. It will not do, however, to parade him as perfectly regular in opposition to the alleged irregularity of the Rev. John Wesley.

According to Dr. Porteus, who was made Bishop of Chester in 1776, and, on the death of Bishop Lowth, translated to the see of London in 1787, both John and Charles Wesley had by their actions ceased to be good Churchmen, and the Methodists had ceased to be a part of the Church of England.

A friend applied to Bishop Porteus in behalf of a Dr. Draper, an episcopally ordained clergyman, whom the bishop had prohibited from officiating in his diocese, and to this appeal the bishop replied :

“As I understood that Dr. Draper was what you represent him to be, a man of piety and a good preacher, it gave me, I assure you, no small pain to feel myself under the necessity of excluding him from the pulpits of my diocese ; but his conduct rendered it in me an indispensable duty. Instead of confining himself, which, as a minister of the Church

of England, he ought to have done, to the celebration of divine service in places of worship licensed or consecrated by his diocesan and authorized by law, he chose to become the president of a college and preacher in a chapel founded by Lady Huntingdon for the purpose of training up lay preachers for conventicles, licensed as Dissenting meeting-houses. Lady Huntingdon, though a pious woman, was unquestionably not a member of the Church of England, but, what is strictly and properly so called, a *Methodist*, professing the doctrines of one of the first founders of Methodism, George Whitefield, and educating young men to preach those doctrines without episcopal ordination. There could not, therefore, be a more injudicious and offensive measure, or one more hostile to the Church of England, than to become president of such a college and the preacher in such a chapel founded for such a purpose.” *

Continuing, he says: “What Dr. Draper has done is moreover directly repugnant to the canons of the Church of England, which prohibit every minister of that Church from preaching in any chapel that is not sanctioned and allowed by the ecclesiastical laws of the realm under very severe penalties; and were I to proceed to extremities, those penalties must be inflicted. But I have taken a milder course. I have only excluded from the parochial churches of my diocese a clergyman who has separated himself for a

* *Life of Dr. Porteus, Bishop of London*, p. 267.

considerable part of the year from the Established Church and set up a Church of his own, neither licensed nor consecrated by his diocesan. I neither blame Dr. Draper nor any other man for following the dictates of his own conscience in matters of religion. I would have every man permitted to worship God without interruption or molestation in the manner he most approves. But, then, let him be consistent. Let him not halt between two opinions. Let him not vibrate between two modes of worship. Let him not be a Methodist in the morning and a Church of England man in the afternoon. I never can consent that any clergyman in my diocese should so divide himself between sectarism and the Establishment, between the Church of England and the Church of Lady Huntingdon. Let him take his part and adhere to it steadily and uniformly throughout." *

This was the opinion of a bishop who was esteemed one of the most liberal-minded prelates of the Church of England, and who was considered as too complaisant to the Dissenters. According to him the Methodists were even then distinct and separate from the Church of England. It was one thing to be of the Methodists, and another thing to be of the Establishment. The offense of Dr. Draper was essentially the same as that of both the Wesleys. They preached in places which were not licensed or consecrated by the diocesan. They recognized lay preaching, and they

* *Life of Dr. Porteus, Bishop of London*, p. 269.

were guilty of "educating young men to preach" "without episcopal ordination;" and in doing these things, according to this bishop, they had separated "from the Established Church and set up a Church of" their "own, neither licensed nor consecrated by" their "diocesan."

John Wesley may not always have paused in his active career to consider all the legitimate consequences of his deeds and opinions, for he was accustomed to do what seemed right at the time, and to let the future consequences take care of themselves; but he went on governing the harmony of his life by the key-note which Lord King had struck in 1746, the effect of which was intensified by the work of Stillingfleet. On the 8th of June, 1780, John Wesley thus wrote to his brother Charles:

"Read Bishop Stillingfleet's *Irenicon*, or any impartial history of the ancient Church, and I believe you will think as I do. I verily believe I have as good a right to ordain as to administer the Lord's Supper. But I see abundance of reasons why I should not use that right, unless I was turned out of the Church. At present we are just in our place." *

This was the logic of his inference from Lord King's account of the primitive Church and Stillingfleet's *Irenicon*. Presbyters and bishops were the same order, and, therefore, presbyters had the same right to ordain. He was a presbyter, and, therefore,

* Wesley's Works, vol. xii, p. 137.

he had the right to ordain, though for the present he holds that power in abeyance. The ultimate outcome of these views will appear hereafter.

John Wesley still clung to the State Church in which he was born, but he had discarded nearly all the peculiar notions it had been supposed to hold. As Tyerman says, "Notwithstanding his strong affection for the Church of England, we find Wesley, almost at the commencement of his Methodist career, entertaining doubts respecting its ecclesiastical polity." *

Once revering the State Church as the only proper ecclesiastical organization, he came to regard it as "a merely political institution." From believing in three clerical orders by divine right, he came to believe that bishops had no higher order than presbyters. From believing in diocesan episcopacy as an apostolic institution, he came to deny that it had been established by the apostles. From believing that episcopal government was of divine authority, and that there could be no true church without that form of government, he came to believe that there was no particular form of government enjoined by the New Testament as of perpetual obligation, but that any church was at liberty to choose any form of polity, or to change its polity according to circumstances. From believing that the only true church was episcopal, he came to look upon non-episcopal bodies as legitimate

* Tyerman's *Life of Wesley*, vol. i, p. 508.

churches. From believing that no one could perform the functions of the ministry without episcopal ordination, he came to believe that others had just as good a right, and that even those who were commonly called laymen might have the right to preach. From believing that there could be only one true church, he came to believe that those who separated from the Church of England were not schismatics.

It is true that he personally adhered to the Church in which he had been reared, but it is also true that he created a great ecclesiastical organization which was distinct from and independent of the Church of England, and that he provided for the perpetuation of organic Methodism after his decease, as may be seen, among other things, by the deed of declaration which Wesley executed on the 28th of February, 1784, and which a few days afterward was enrolled in the high court of chancery. This deed, providing for the control of the property and defining the nature and powers of the Conference, legally cemented and perpetuated the Methodist organization.

That Wesley meant Methodism to continue to have an organic existence is evident from his "Thoughts upon Some Late Occurrences," which he wrote on the 3d of March, 1785. In it he says: "You see, then, in all the pains I have taken about this absolutely necessary deed, I have been laboring, not for myself (I have no interest therein), but for the whole body of Methodists, in order to fix them upon such

a foundation as is likely to stand as long as the sun and moon endure." *

Another evidence of his intention that organic Methodism should continue after his death is the provision which he made, later in the same year, for the perpetuity of the Methodist system in America, which was then beyond the domain of the Church of England.

As far as he personally was concerned, he did not consider that he had withdrawn from the Established Church, for he had never formally resigned, neither had he been formally expelled; but he was, nevertheless, the head of a great ecclesiastical organization which was distinct from the State Church and over which the national Church had never exercised control. He had not withdrawn from the Established Church, but the ecclesiastical organism which he had created was already separate. He spoke for himself personally when he said that he had not separated. The Methodist body, though controlled by him, had become something which could be spoken of as distinct from himself. It obeyed him while he lived, but when he died it would be free; and what then?

In view of the facts of history, it requires a great deal of credulity to believe that he expected that after his death the Methodists would be absorbed by the Anglican Church. In providing, for example, for the perpetuation of British Methodism, with its Conference, its preaching places and other property, and

* *Methodist Magazine*, 1785, p. 269.

its peculiar ecclesiastical machinery, Wesley must have felt the probability, and practical certainty, that after his death English Methodism would not consider that it owed any allegiance to the national Church. Indeed, the very fact that he so carefully made these arrangements when he had reached such an age that he knew he could not much longer be with them, leads to the inference that he believed they would be separate, and that after his departure he desired them to be distinct. However, we are hardly left to conjecture, for Charles Wesley, in a letter, written August 14, 1785, to his brother John, says to him, "You told me they would separate by and by." So that, on the testimony of his own brother, John Wesley had foreseen that the Methodists would be a separate body. But the most remarkable fact is that he, who, from the time of reading Lord King, had believed he had as much power to ordain as any bishop in England, did at last put that power into operation, and did ordain a number of ministers; thus providing for the administration of the sacraments, and so giving the Methodists all that was considered absolutely necessary for a church organization. He, therefore, not only provided for the perpetuity of the organism, but also provided ordained ministers, giving the Methodists power to have the sacraments among themselves and independently of the clergy of other Churches.

John Wesley, on the 19th of August, 1785, reply-

ing to his brother's letter from which we have just quoted, would not admit that he had separated from the national Church, and said: "I have no more desire to separate than I had fifty years ago. I still attend all the ordinances of the Church, at all opportunities; and I constantly and earnestly advise all that are connected with me so to do. When Mr. Smyth pressed us to separate from the Church he meant, 'Go to church no more.' And this was what I meant twenty-seven years ago when I persuaded our brethren not to separate from the Church."

But Charles pronounced the act of ordaining to be practical and actual separation from the Church of England, and the celebrated jurist, Lord Mansfield, said, "Ordination is separation." *

After Wesley had ordained some of his preachers, it was suggested that this would lead to separation. In meeting the suggestion that the Methodists might entirely separate from the State Church after his death, he quotes the question and gives his answer as follows: "'But, for all this, is it not possible there may be such a separation after you are dead?' Undoubtedly it is. But what I said at our first Conference, above forty years ago, I say still: 'I dare not omit doing what good I can while I live, for fear of evil that may follow when I am dead.'" †

* Tyerman's *Life of John Wesley*, vol. iii, p. 447.

† *Methodist Magazine*, 1786, p. 678; Tyerman's *Life of Wesley*, vol. iii, p. 442.

He does not deny that that is the tendency. He does not deny that that will be the result. He admits that undoubtedly it is a possibility. The whole answer carries with it the inference that he recognized the probability of Methodist independence, and yet he took the steps that tended in that direction because they seemed to him to be his present duty, and he did what he thought was his duty without regard for the consequences. He sees the possibility, and does what tends to make it an actuality.

In view of the foregoing facts it seems plain that Wesley foresaw that the Methodists would be a distinct organization, and hence made provision for the perpetuity of the Methodist organism, and also provided for the administration of the sacraments by their own ministers; for, if he had not desired them to be thus distinct, it would seem natural that he would not have made any such provision.

CHAPTER IV.

WESLEY'S RELATION TO THE EPISCOPATE OF AMERICAN
METHODISM.

THE Rev. George Whitefield, one of the earliest associates of Wesley in the evangelical movement called Methodism, made a number of evangelistic tours through the British colonies extending along the Atlantic coast, from 1738 until he died at Newburyport, Mass., in 1770.

This graduate of Oxford University and regularly ordained clergyman of the Church of England brought to America a new type of liberal Christianity. Though a clergyman of the Established Church, he was at the same time a Methodist evangelist, and had fellowship with Christians of all denominations; affiliating just as readily with Presbyterian ministers as he did with the episcopally ordained clergy of the national Church. He co-operated with Christian believers no matter what their name. Though he did not plant, he was the forerunner of Wesleyan Methodism. He was the John the Baptist who prepared the way for the Methodist body which was to take permanent possession. He did not organize the results of his labors, but he prepared the people of the colonies, and especially in the middle and south-

ern sections, for the occupancy of the country by the organized Methodism which had taken form under the executive genius of the Rev. John Wesley.

Wesleyan Methodism in America had its origin at least as early as 1766. Then the colonies were sparsely settled, but the rapid movements of the itinerant preachers, so well suited to the conditions then existing, soon carried the practical teachings of Methodism to the very outposts of American civilization. Wesley had sent preachers from time to time, and had governed or directed the work in America through one whom he appointed, and who was called a general assistant. Under this superior officer were other assistants, who had immediate direction of the rest of the preachers.

At one time Francis Asbury occupied the position of general assistant, and at a later day Mr. Wesley sent Thomas Rankin to fill the place. These general assistants exercised a power in America similar to that which Wesley exerted in England, but they acted in subordination to him, and all the Methodists in America cheerfully recognized Wesley's authority and promptly obeyed his commands.

When the War of the Revolution broke out direct relations with Wesley were for a time broken, but the American Methodists still retained their allegiance to him. Some of the Methodist preachers of English birth returned to England, but Francis Asbury, though an Englishman, remained. Among those

who left was the general assistant, Thomas Rankin, and, as they were without such an officer, and as Asbury had previously filled that position, the American Methodist preachers requested Asbury to resume the powers of that relation. He consented, and discharged the functions of that office and generally administered the affairs of the American Methodists during the disturbed period of the war and the unsettled times which followed. At a later date Wesley formally appointed him general assistant, and that position he held up to the latter part of 1784. The Revolutionary War greatly interfered with the work of the different denominations, and when the war closed the churches generally were in a sadly shattered condition.

With the independence of the country the authority of the Church of England was destroyed, and its prestige was greatly weakened. The Church of England no longer had control, and the English ecclesiastical laws did not apply.

Most of the churches which had belonged to the national Church of England were without clergymen. Most of the clergy were supported by English money, and, as most of them were Tories and would pray for King George, they either ceased to exercise the functions of the ministry or fled from the country.

Bishop White, speaking of the unfortunate condition of the remains of the Church of England, says: "To add to the evil, many able and worthy ministers,

cherishing their allegiance to the king of Great Britain, and entertaining conscientious scruples against the use of the Liturgy under the restriction of omitting the appointed prayers for him, ceased to officiate. Owing to these circumstances the doors of the far greater number of the Episcopal churches were closed for several years. In the State (Pennsylvania) in which this work is edited there was through its whole extent but one resident minister of the Church in question—he who records the fact.” *

Again he says: “In Maryland and Virginia there were many of the clergy whose connections with their flocks were rendered by their personal characters dependent wholly on the Church establishment, and, of course, fell with it. Again, many worthy ministers entertained scruples in regard to the oath of allegiance to the States, without the taking of which they were prohibited from officiating by laws alike impolitic and severe. But it must be seen that scruples of this sort were of another nature than the question here stated for consideration. In the Northern States there were no such laws, but the clergy generally declined officiating on the ground of their ecclesiastical tie to the Liturgy of the Church of England. As they were generally men of respectable characters, the discontinuance of the administrations had an unhappy effect on the Church, and is here mentioned as

* White's *Memoirs*, p. 17.

one cause contributing to the low state in which we were left by the Revolutionary War.” *

Winterbotham, in 1793, said: “The inhabitants of Wilmington, Newbern, Edenton, and Halifax districts in North Carolina, making about three-fifths of the State, once professed themselves of the Episcopal Church. The clergy in those districts were chiefly missionaries, and in forming their political attachments at the commencement of the late war personal interest and real interest, or perhaps a conviction of the impolicy of opposing Great Britain, from whence they derived their salaries, induced them almost universally to declare themselves in favor of the British government, and to emigrate. There may be one or two of the original clergy remaining, but at present they have no particular pastoral charge; indeed, the inhabitants in the districts above mentioned seem now to be making the experiment whether Christianity can exist long in a country where there is no visible Christian Church. The Baptists and Methodists have sent a number of missionary preachers into these districts, and some of them have large congregations. It is probable that one or other of these denominations, and perhaps both, may acquire consistency, and establish permanent churches.” †

The biographer of Bishop Hobart adds his picture of the state of affairs resulting from the War of In-

* White's *Memoirs of Protestant Episcopal Church*, 2d Ed. pp. 76, 77.

† Winterbotham's *History of the United States*, vol. iii, p. 211.

dependence. Referring to the time when the war began, he says :

“At the North, in a few of the larger cities—Philadelphia, New York, Newport, and Boston—congregations had by this time arisen with means sufficient to support their own clergy, but beyond these towns all were missionaries, paid and supported either wholly or in part from abroad. The evils of such a condition were obvious. At the South legal Establishment and at the North foreign funds made the clergy independent of the laity, and the laity unconcerned about the Church. From the want of an episcopate, there was no spiritual jurisdiction, either to confer orders, administer confirmation, or enforce discipline. The Church had consequently neither point of union nor power of increase; its ministers were chiefly foreigners, and, therefore, alien to the feelings of the people; while of such as went for orders it was estimated that one fifth perished amid the perils of the journey.

“To a Church thus constituted (if Church it might be termed) the consequences of the Revolution were, for a time, fatal. Identified by popular prejudice with the royal government, it fell in public opinion with it. In Virginia and Maryland, where the Church had been strongest—numbering in the former alone above one hundred clergymen—the popular fury was immediately directed against it as the stronghold of the royal party. The clergy were driven from their

cures, the churches shut up or sold, and, in defiance of law, the glebe-lands eventually declared forfeited. In the North an equal fate awaited. The support of the missionaries being withdrawn, they, too, were soon forced to follow; the churches closed, and the congregations scattered. So utter, in short, was this dispersion that for some years (to give an individual illustration) the present Bishop of Pennsylvania was the sole remnant of the clergy in the whole of that province. The War of the Revolution may therefore in truth be said to have desolated the Church, for out of that struggle it came forth with deserted temples, broken altars and alienated property; deprived of its ablest clergy by death or exile, destitute of means of ordaining others, and laboring under the popular odium of attachment to monarchical principles and a foreign government, and that government the very one from whose thralldom the country had just freed itself. Never, certainly, was any portion of the Christian Church in a state of greater depression, and, what with internal weakness and external hostility, there seemed but little chance of its ever rising out of it." *

The same writer gives a closer insight into the internal condition when he continues: "To add to these accumulated sorrows, the few churches that remained had no tie of brotherhood among themselves; the external bond being removed, they fell apart like a rope of sand; there was neither union,

* *Memoirs of Bishop Hobart*, p. 78.

nor government, nor strength; each stood in its own state of helpless independency, fast tending—to use the expressive language of Burke—toward ‘the dust and powder of individuality.’ In this state of destitution, to crown all other evils, the anarchy of heresy began to creep in among them. One of the most influential churches in Boston, and the oldest in the Northern States—tracing back to the time of Charles II, openly professed Unitarianism, and new modeled its liturgy accordingly. Churchmen in South Carolina were for adopting a nominal episcopacy. The Legislature of Maryland entertained the plan of themselves supporting the ordainers, and Socinian principles were avowed by some among the members of the Church and suspected among many.” *

This was the condition of affairs as far as the Church of England in America was concerned. As a Church it had fallen to pieces; only the ruins were left. As a general thing, the Church and its clergy, on account of their connection with England, were not popular with the people. Few clergymen were left in the churches that remained, and the masses who had looked to this branch of the clergy for baptism and the communion were left without the sacraments. Dr. Hawks, a clergyman, speaking of the year 1777, says: “The sacraments were no longer administered in many of the parishes,” † and Dr. White remarks

* *Memoirs of Bishop Hobart*, p. 80.

† *Protestant Episcopal Church in Virginia*, p. 148.

that "after the fall of the Establishment a considerable proportion of the clergy continued to enjoy the glebes—the law considering them as freeholds during life—*without performing a single act of sacred duty*, except, perhaps, that of marriage. They knew that their services would not have been attended." *

Dr. Hawks, speaking of the Church of England in Virginia, where she had been specially strong, says: "When the contest was over she came out of the war with a large number of her churches destroyed or injured irreparably, with twenty-three of her ninety-five parishes extinct or forsaken, and of the remaining seventy-two thirty-four were destitute of ministerial services; while of her ninety-eight clergymen twenty-eight only remained who had lived through the storm." †

Bishop White has testified that the Church of England "was becoming more and more unpopular with some, because it was not considered as promoting piety, and, with these and others, because they thought the provision for it a useless burden on the community;" ‡ and the Rev. Mr. Jarratt, a Virginia clergyman, has stated that "most of the clergy preached what was little better than deism."

At the close of the Revolutionary War the American Methodists were probably the most compact and

* Bishop White's *Memoirs of the Church*, Second Ed., p. 76.

† Bangs's *Original Church of Christ*, pp. 114, 115.

‡ Bishop White's *Mem.*, pp. 75, 76.

best organized religious body in the country, and presented a marked contrast in this respect with the disintegrated remains of the Church of England. In 1777, notwithstanding the trouble and difficulties occasioned by the invasion and the moving armies, they had fifteen widely spread circuits, thirty-six itinerant preachers, and not fewer than 6,968 full and accredited members.* Just after the surrender of Lord Cornwallis they had thirty circuits, fifty-nine preachers, and 11,785 members; so that they had made a great increase in the midst of hostilities.† Shortly after the treaty of peace, which was signed on the 3d of September, 1783, and which recognized the independence of the United States, they had forty-six circuits, eighty-three preachers, and 14,988 members.‡

This was a compact and, we may say, the only thoroughly organized body in the United States, with preaching places scattered in city and country, with preachers going almost every-where, not loosely and without system, but in relation to the ecclesiastical body or Conference to which they belonged, and which met annually under the control of Wesley's general assistant, who was the head of all.

Thorough as was this religious organization it did not profess to authorize these preachers to administer the sacraments. In this they followed the advice of Mr. Wesley. The Methodist people generally went to the clergy of the Church of England for baptism

* Minutes for 1777.

† *Ibid.*, 1782.

‡ *Ibid.*, 1784.

and the Lord's Supper, and in Virginia they were greatly assisted in this matter by the Rev. Devereux Jarratt and the Rev. Archibald McRoberts, regular clergymen of the Established Church, who gave encouragement to the Methodist preachers and administered the sacraments to their people. These were exceptional cases, and for their affiliation with the Methodists they had to suffer somewhat in their own denomination. During the war the Rev. Mr. McRoberts left the English Church and became a Presbyterian.* The Rev. Mr. Jarratt "was looked upon with an evil eye by the Established clergy." Dr. Bennett remarks that "he had but little intercourse with them, though he occasionally attended their conventions. At one held in Williamsburg in 1774 he was treated so unkindly, and heard the doctrine of Christianity so ridiculed, that he determined to attend no more." "He kept this resolution until 1785, when he was present at one in Richmond; but he was so coldly received that he remained only a few hours, and then rode home."†

The war, however, had so affected the clergy and the prospects of the churches remaining among the ruins of the Establishment that the Methodists were almost entirely left without the sacraments, and a question of practical and present importance was forced upon them for decision. They ought to have the sacraments. How could they secure them?

* Bennett's *Memorials of Methodism in Virginia*, p. 59. † *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 63.

They could no longer depend upon the clergy of the English Church, for there were not enough of them, even if they had been willing to meet the demand. They could not get episcopal ordination, for there was no bishop in the country. They could not look to the Church of England, for it had no longer any power in the country. They could not trust to what might come out of the ruins of the Established Church, for no one could tell whether any thing would ever come out of them ; and as the prejudices of the people were strongly against that which had been a part of the British government, it was exceedingly doubtful whether these remains would be organized into a permanent Church. Even if such an organization should be effected no one could tell when it would take place, and present necessities had to be met. For the Methodist preachers to receive ordination from a non-episcopal body, if under the circumstances that had been possible, would have been, in the estimation of High Churchmen, no better than if the Methodist preachers had ordained themselves. The only question that seemed to be left was whether they would ordain themselves or administer the sacraments without ordination. The sacramental question had, indeed, caused some discussion prior to the war. Some thought the Methodist preachers were by their position entitled to administer the sacraments. Others were influenced by what they deemed the necessities of the times.

Robert Strawbridge, the first Methodist preacher in Maryland, did administer the sacraments, as doubtless did one or two others at an early day. Mr. Asbury records in his Journal, under date of December 23, 1772, an account of a Conference where the fifth question discussed was, "Will the people be contented without our administering the sacraments?" Asbury makes the following note under this question: "J. K. [John King] was neuter; Brother S. [Robert Strawbridge] pleaded much for the ordinances; and so did the people, who appeared to be much biased by him. I told them I would not agree to it at that time, and insisted on our abiding by our rules. But Mr. B. [Richard Boardman (?)] had given them their way at the quarterly meeting held here before, and I was obliged to connive at some things for the sake of peace."*

The next year Wesley sent over Thomas Rankin to be his general assistant in control of American affairs, and "clothed Mr. Rankin with powers superior to any which had been vested in his predecessors in office."†

At the Conference held in 1773, over which Mr. Rankin presided, the question of administering the sacraments came up and was discussed. Robert Strawbridge, who had founded Methodism in Maryland, so strenuously maintained his right to adminis-

* Asbury's Journal, vol. i, p. 38.

† Bangs's *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. i, p. 80.

ter the sacraments to those who chose to receive them from him that the Conference made a concession in his case. Asbury records the decision as follows: "No preacher in our connection shall be permitted to administer the ordinances at this time, except Mr. S., and he under the particular direction of the assistant." *

It will be observed that, as regular preachers, it is not said they have no right to administer the sacraments, but that they shall not "be permitted" to do so "at this time." It was also decided that the authority of Mr. Wesley should extend to the preachers and people in America, and that they should be governed by the Discipline that prevailed in England. The agitation in regard to the sacraments was renewed at a number of the subsequent Conferences without any change in the decision against the preachers administering the sacraments.

At last, in 1779, a crisis was reached. A Conference was held on the 28th of April in Kent County, Del., to accommodate Mr. Asbury. This was attended by the ministers north and east of the Potomac. On the 18th of May another Conference was held in Fluvanna County, Va., and to this the Southern preachers went. This was the "regularly appointed" session, but, as already suggested, it did not contain all the preachers.

The question of the sacraments had been postponed

* Asbury's Journal, vol. i, p. 56.

by the Conference of 1778 to the session of 1779, so that it came up legitimately at Fluvanna. In the discussion it was urged as a reason why the preachers should now administer the sacraments that "the Episcopal Establishment" had been dissolved. The following questions and answers have been preserved in the manuscript Journal of the Rev. Philip Gatch, one of the members of the Fluvanna Conference :

" *Ques.* 14. What are our reasons for taking up the administration of the ordinances among us ?

" *Ans.* Because the Episcopal Establishment is now dissolved, and, therefore, in almost all our circuits the members are without the ordinances—We believe it to be our duty.

" *Ques.* 19. What form of ordination shall be observed to authorize any preacher to administer ?

" *Ans.* By that of a presbytery.

" *Ques.* 20. How shall the presbytery be appointed ?

" *Ans.* By a majority of the preachers.

" *Ques.* 21. Who are the presbytery ?

" *Ans.* P Gatch, R. Ellis, James Foster, and, in case of necessity, Leroy Cole.

" *Ques.* 22. What power is vested in the presbytery by this choice ?

" *Ans.* 1. To administer the ordinances themselves.
2. To authorize any other preacher or preachers approved of them by the form of laying on of hands.

“ *Ques.* 23. What is to be observed as touching the administration of the ordinances, and to whom shall they be administered ?

“ *Ans.* To those who are under our care and discipline.

“ *Ques.* 24. Shall we rebaptize any under our care ?

“ *Ans.* No.

“ *Ques.* 25. What mode shall be adopted for the administration of baptism ?

“ *Ans.* Either sprinkling or plunging, as the parent or adult shall choose.

“ *Ques.* 26. What ceremony shall be used in the administration ?

“ *Ans.* Let it be according to our Lord’s command, Matt. xxviii, 19—short and extempore.

“ *Ques.* 27. Shall the sign of the cross be used ?

“ *Ans.* No.

“ *Ques.* 28. Who shall receive the charge of the child, after baptism, for its future instruction ?

“ *Ans.* The parent or persons who have the care of the child, with advice from the preacher.

“ *Ques.* 29. What mode shall be adopted administration of the Lord’s Supper ?

“ *Ans.* Kneeling is thought the most proper ; but, in cases of conscience, may be left to the choice of the communicant.

“ *Ques.* 30. What ceremony shall be observed in this ordinance ?

“ *Ans.* After singing, praying, and exhortation,

the preacher delivers the bread, saying, 'The body of our Lord Jesus Christ,' etc., after the Church order." *

Freeborn Garrettson, one of the most prominent Methodist preachers of that day, thus condenses the story: "In May, 1779, the regular Conference was held, according to appointment, in the Brockenback Church, Fluvanna County, Virginia. The question, 'Shall we administer the ordinances?' was again agitated and was answered in the affirmative. Some of the oldest preachers were therefore set apart to administer the sacraments. The troubles were such that we of the North did not attend." †

The decisions of this Conference, which they have given in the form of question and answer, furnish a very interesting study. First, there are indications of liberality of view in permitting choice as to the mode of baptism and also of receiving the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Second, they did not intend to impose their administration upon others, but to administer to those under their own care and discipline. Third, they did not propose episcopal, but presbyterial, ordination.

They formed their presbytery in the most natural way. They "set apart," as Garrettson remarks, "some of the oldest preachers." These were literally the elders or presbyters. The three elders, Gatch, Ellis,

* Dr. Lee's *Life and Times of the Rev. Jesse Lee*, pp. 79, 80.

† Garrettson's Semi-Centennial Sermon.

and Foster, "and, in case of necessity, Leroy Cole," composed the presbytery.

This presbytery ordained one another, probably calling in Cole, so that each one would be ordained by three, and afterward ordained such of the preachers then present "as were desirous of receiving ordination."*

In this Conference there were eighteen preachers, and they were the pastors of about four thousand members. Their need was great and their responsibility was equally great. Who can prove that under the circumstances these preachers were to be blamed or that they were wrong? Who can demonstrate that they had no right to do as they did? It is the duty of all Christians to receive the sacraments, but the people generally were without them, and unless some measure like this was resorted to they would continue to be without them.

But it may be said that none but ministers could ordain. If that were so, still it remains that these were *de facto* ministers, and in the estimation of their people were *de jure* ministers. They were to their members just as truly ministers as the ministers of other denominations were to their congregations. They were not laymen who occasionally left their business to deliver a religious address or preach a sermon in an emergency. They were recognized as duly called and dedicated to the ministry

* Stevens's *History of Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. ii, p. 60.

of the Gospel, and they exclusively devoted themselves to this holy calling.

If such men were fit to preach the Gospel as their life-work, and to gather congregations and exercise pastoral care over them, why were they not fit to baptize children, and to present to their people the memorials of the broken body and the shed blood of Jesus Christ, whose teachings from time to time they ministered to their heads and hearts? If they were not under ordinary conditions, why were they not amid this extraordinary state of affairs—when there was great need throughout the whole country, and especially in the southern section?

If they had believed in the necessity of episcopal ordination, and had wanted it, it was impossible for them to have obtained it, for, as before mentioned, there was not a Protestant bishop anywhere in the land, while the scattered remains of the Church of England were in confusion and did not know what to do for themselves.

But suppose they were laymen, and not ministers of the Gospel; were their people to remain without the privileges of the Christian Church? Were their children to go without the rite of baptism? Were their members to be prevented from participating in the communion? If they were nothing more than laymen, under such conditions of extreme distress necessity would cover and justify their act. The maxim, "Necessity knows no law," is true in ecclesi-

astical affairs as well as in other things, and this law of necessity had long been admitted by ecclesiastical writers of the English Church. They admitted, for example, the validity of lay baptism in time of necessity.

Tertullian said: "Are not those of us who are laics priests? It is written, 'He hath made us kings and priests to God and his Father.' The authority of the Church has appointed the difference between the order and the people, and the dignity is sacred where there is an assembly of the order; so *where there is no assembly of the ecclesiastical order* you both offer [that is, in the eucharist], *and baptize, and are alone a priest to yourself*. Moreover, where there are three, there is a church, *although they be laymen*. For each one lives by his own faith, nor is there respect of persons with God, since not the hearers of the law, but the doers, are justified by God, as the apostle says. Therefore, if you *have in yourself the rights of a priest where necessity requires it*," etc. "God would have *all of us* so circumstanced as to be every-where ready to *perform his sacraments*."*

Thus Tertullian held that in case of necessity even laymen could administer the sacraments, and that "where there are three, there is a church, *although they be laymen*," and consequently, being a

* Trans. in Goode's *Divine Rule of Faith and Practice*. London, 1855, vol. ii, p. 288.

church, could, in time of necessity, organize a church and establish and ordain a valid ministry. Bishop Jewel quoted this opinion of Tertullian approvingly, and after indorsing it as authority reasoned from it.

Many of the older writers of the Anglican Church uttered sentiments that justify the action of these preachers, even if they were nothing more than laymen.

If there was any defect in their action it was that the ministers present were only a minority of the Methodist ministers then in the United States. It is true the Fluvanna was the "regularly appointed" Conference, and that if the others did not come, but preferred to meet at a different place, that was their own responsibility. Still, it was not the action of the majority of those who really belonged to the Conference. The Northern ministers, with the general assistant at their head, did not approve of the course of their Southern brethren. The result was a division of sentiment which was not conducive to harmony.

The Fluvanna Conference decided to meet the next year at Baltimore, on the 24th of April, 1780. This was considered the regular Conference for the year, but only two of the Virginia Conference, namely, P. Gatch and R. Ellis, were present. They endeavored to harmonize the two sections. The Conference, however, adopted the following:

“*Ques.* 20. Does this whole Conference disapprove the step our brethren have taken in Virginia?

“*Ans.* Yes.

“*Ques.* 21. Do we look upon them no longer as Methodists in connection with Mr. Wesley and us till they come back?

“*Ans.* Agreed.”

They also passed the following :

“*Ques.* 13. Will this Conference grant the privilege to all the friendly clergy of the Church of England, at the request or desire of the people to preach or administer the ordinances in our preaching-houses or chapels?

“*Ans.* Yes.”

Nevertheless an attempt was made to adjust the difficulty, as we see by the following questions and answers :

“*Ques.* 22. Shall brothers Asbury, Garrettson, and Watters attend the Virginia Conference, and inform them of our proceedings in this, and receive their answer?

“*Ans.* Yes.

“*Ques.* 26. What must be the conditions of our union with our Virginia brethren?

“*Ans.* To suspend all their administrations for one year, and all meet together in Baltimore.” *

The Southern preachers met at Manakin Town, Powhattan County, Virginia, on the 9th of May,

1780,* and the committee of reconciliation from the Baltimore Conference met them and entered into negotiations to preserve the unity of American Methodism. The delegation was cordially received by the Virginia ministers, and Mr. Watters, one of the committee, says: "We found our brethren as loving and as full of zeal as ever, and as fully determined on persevering in their newly adopted mode; for to all their former arguments they now added (what with many was infinitely stronger than all the arguments in the world) that the Lord approved and had blessed his own ordinances, by them administered the past year."†

With such convictions on the one side and strong opposition on the other the prospect for reconciliation was not flattering. So the Rev. Jesse Lee, one of the preachers of that day, writes: "At that time Mr. Asbury had to exert all his powers and to use all possible prudence in order to bring about a settled peace and union among all the preachers. The most influential preachers in that separation in favor of the ordinances were Philip Gatch, John Dickins, and James O'Kelly.

"After much contention and distress Mr. Asbury proposed to the Southern preachers a plan for union, which was this: that they should not administer the ordinances for a twelve month, and that they should all then meet together in conference at Baltimore, and in the

* Asbury's Journal, p. 283.

† *Life of Watters.*

course of the year they would write to Mr. Wesley in England, and lay their situation before him and get his advice. The plan took with the Virginia preachers, and they consented to the proposal. By this prudent step a division was prevented, and a blessed union restored.”*

It will be observed that the Northern preachers did not deny the right of the others to administer the sacraments, but they were all under the authority of Mr. Wesley, and had agreed to obey the same discipline as that which governed the English Conference, and evidently, in view of these facts, both parties agreed to submit the matter to their superior.

Says a recent writer, the Rev. W P Harrison, D. D.: “Looking back upon these events of more than a century ago, we are astonished at the patience and long-suffering of these men of God. They knew that Mr. Wesley did not understand their surroundings. He could not see, as they saw it, the necessity for ordained ministers, that the service of the Lord’s house ‘might be perfect, wanting nothing.’ In England, where the *form* of religion was familiar to the great majority of the people, the deprivation was comparatively slight; and in most cases it was a question of propriety whether to receive the ordinances at the hands of men who were not scriptural shepherds of the flock, but mere hirelings of the state. In America it was a question of receiving the ordinances through the new

* Lee’s *History of the Methodists*, 1810, p. 73.

arrangement, or not at all. There was no alternative. No man could tell how long the war might last, and with each new convert to the Gospel the issue presented itself—no baptism, no Supper of the Lord. Other denominations taunted the Methodists with this state of things, and the humiliation of such an attitude was great in the extreme. The Presbyterians might have been reminded of the fact that John Calvin had never been ordained at all (Bayle's Dictionary, art. 'Calvin'); and the Baptists could only point backward a hundred and forty years to Roger Williams and Ezekiel Holliman for the beginning of a 'succession of ministerial orders' (Benedict's *Hist. of the Baptists*, p. 441). The Episcopalians, indeed, might have been reminded of the fact that Thomas Cranmer, the father of the English Reformation, had never been ordained deacon, priest, or bishop, but from the status of a layman stepped at once to the office of an archbishop."*

Efforts, however, are now to be made to acquaint Mr. Wesley with the true condition of affairs in America—the breaking up of the Established Church, the flight of many of the clergy, the impossibility of the masses obtaining the sacraments.

Two days after the agreement between the committee and the Virginia Conference Asbury made the following entry in his Journal: "Rest this day to

* Dr. Harrison's *High-Churchman Disarmed*. Nashville, 1886, pp. 174, 175.

write to Mr. Wesley.” * No doubt at this writing he explained the difficulties to Mr. Wesley, and strongly urged immediate action.

On the 23d of May he says: “I have labored to get our friends well affected to the Episcopal Church; what could I do better when we had not the ordinances among us?” † Again, on the 16th of September of the same year, he makes this entry in his Journal: “Wrote to Mr. Wesley at the desire of the Virginia Conference, who had agreed to suspend the administration of the ordinances for one year.” ‡ In a foot-note inserted in his printed Journal under the above record, Asbury corrects a mistake, made by Dr. Whitehead in his *Life of Wesley*, in the following words: “It is in that work stated that had Mr. Wesley obtained the consent of the American preachers and people, he might have sent ministers regularly ordained to the society in that part of the world. The truth is that the American Methodists, both ministers and people, wished to have such ministers among them, that they might partake, like other Christian societies, of the ordinances of the Church of God; and when ministers did thus come they received them generally and joyfully. I will further presume that Mr. Wesley received few letters from America in which that subject was not pressed upon him.” It is therefore more than probable that Mr. Wesley re-

* Asbury's Journal, May 12, 1780, p. 284.

† *Ibid.*, May 23, 1780, p. 287.

‡ *Ibid.*, Sept. 16, 1780, p. 309.

ceived many communications from the American Methodists urging him to secure for them ordained ministers, or make some arrangements by which they could obtain the sacraments. But Mr. Asbury, being the general assistant, was by virtue of his position the most influential of all those who wrote.

He informed Mr. Wesley of "the extreme uneasiness of the people's minds for want of the sacraments; that thousands of their children were unbaptized, and the members of the societies in general had not partaken of the Lord's Supper for many years." * Again, on the 20th of March, 1784, Asbury writes another letter to Wesley, in which he says: "Dear sir, we are greatly in need of help. A minister and such preachers as you can fully recommend will be very acceptable. Without your recommendation we shall receive none. But nothing is so pleasing to me, sir, as the thought of seeing you here, which is the ardent desire of thousands more in America." †

In the meantime Wesley, notwithstanding the interruption occasioned by the war between the colonies and the mother country, had not forgotten his followers in America. He was perplexed, indeed, about the future of Methodism, both in Europe and in America. He had attained his eighty-first year, and felt that his time on earth was exceedingly short.

* *Life of Wesley*, by Coke and Moore. First Amer. Ed., Philadelphia, 1793, p. 351.

† *Methodist Magazine*, 1786, p. 682.

Possibly he saw that the Methodists must either be independent or disintegrate. His brother Charles a little later said: "After my brother's death what will be their end? They will lose all their influence and importance; they will turn aside to vain janglings; they will settle again upon their lees, and, like other sects of Dissenters, come to nothing." *

John Wesley saw the danger, but he was not so easily disturbed as Charles. Naturally he must have been reluctant to have the great organization which he had constructed go to pieces. He was a man of action, and, instead of wringing his hands and mourning over the possibilities of the future, he went to work to devise a plan to prevent the fulfillment of his brother's prophecy. Doubtless he saw that the Methodist body would continue to exist after he was gone, but he felt it his duty while he had authority to provide against disaster and disruption.

Hence on the 28th day of February, 1784, he executed the Deed of Declaration, and by this cemented and, so to speak, gave a corporate existence to Methodism in Great Britain and Ireland, and provided for the perpetuity of British Methodism.

It was less than one month after this date that Asbury wrote his last letter, above mentioned, again calling Wesley's attention to the pressing needs of his people in America. Asbury's suggestion that Wes-

* *Memoirs of Charles Wesley*, p. 423.

ley should come to America, of course, could not command a moment's attention. In that day of slow and uncomfortable traveling it was out of the question for one past eighty to think of crossing the Atlantic.

He could not go, but he had been appealed to, and it was necessary for him to do something, and that with great promptness. He had a new condition of affairs to consider. A part of his organization was no longer under the British flag. It was in the United States of America.

His English Methodism was one thing; American Methodism was another. British Methodism was under English law, but American Methodism was in a foreign country where British rule had been broken. English Methodism was under the shadow of the State Church, but in America there was no State Church, and all denominations were equal before the law. English Methodists could receive the sacraments from the Wesleys and other episcopally ordained clergymen, or go to the parish churches, but American Methodists were not so provided with ordained ministers, and there were very few churches to go to, and very few of those that remained were supplied with clergymen to administer the sacraments.

Doubtless he was informed of the extent of the ruin of what had been the Church of England, and that no organization of the ruins had been effected.

He had a very different question to consider from that which related to his societies in Britain, and certainly he had not been rash in reaching his decision. More than four years had passed since the Virginia Methodist ministers had agreed to suspend the administration of the sacraments, and to submit their case to Mr. Wesley. He has been slowly coming to his conclusion, but now acts quickly. The English Conference met at Leeds this year (1784), on the 27th day of July, and adjourned on the 3d of August. At this Conference Mr. Wesley announced his intention of sending Dr. Coke and some other preachers to America, and Mr. Richard Whatcoat and Mr. Thomas Vasey offered themselves as missionaries for that purpose and were accepted.” *

The Rev. Thomas Coke, LL.D., was a man of wealth and a scholar. He graduated at Oxford University and became a clergyman of the Church of England. While he was acting as a minister of the Church of England in the South Petherton Parish, Somersetshire, he was greatly influenced by the religious conversation of a Methodist layman, and a marked earnestness soon manifested itself in his ministrations. The result was that a clamor was raised against him as a “Methodist,” though, at that time, he had no connection with Wesley or any of his societies; he was admonished by his bishop and dismissed by his rector; mobs of his own parishioners menaced

* *Life of Wesley*, by Coke and Moore. Philadelphia, 1793, p. 352.

him, and he was "chimed" out of his Church, and found a refuge in the Methodist Conference.*

Richard Whatcoat has been described as "one of the saintliest men in the primitive itinerancy of Methodism." †

George Shadford, who had been a preacher in America, and who understood the needs of the American work, urged Whatcoat to go with Coke. At first he hesitated, but, after observing a day of fasting and prayer for divine guidance, he offered himself for the toil and the sacrifice. Thomas Vasey was of a wealthy family, but gave up wealth and the society of his kindred to submit to the hardships of the Methodist itinerancy. These were the men that Wesley selected and appointed to go to America.

But how could this meet the difficulty? Dr. Coke was the only ordained man in the number, and one man would be entirely inadequate to the task of administering the sacraments to tens of thousands of communicants scattered along the Atlantic coast and stretching back hundreds of miles into the western wilderness. The great need was for ordained men, and yet, if these three ministers went as they were, the American Methodists would be little better off than before. Something more must be done. What could be done? Wesley had believed for nearly forty years that presbyters and bishops were the same order, and that presbyters

* Stevens's *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. ii, pp. 151-155.

† *Ibid.* p. 157.

had the same right as bishops to ordain. Besides this, for some time he had felt that he was a bishop as well as a presbyter. He had no doubt about his right to ordain, but he had been restrained from exercising this right by his interpretation of English law and his respect for the regulations of the State Church. Realizing the need for ordained ministers he naturally thought of inducing some bishop of the Church of England to ordain some of his preachers, and years before he had endeavored to secure episcopal ordination for some of his preachers that they might go to America.

It will be remembered that on the 12th of May, 1780, just after the agreement of the Virginia ministers to cease administering the sacraments for a year, so that the matter might be referred to Mr. Wesley, Asbury wrote to Wesley, no doubt stating the case very fully. The effect that had on the chief overseer of the Methodists may easily be imagined. That very year he applied to the eminent Dr. Lowth, Bishop of London, to ordain ministers for America, but the good bishop declined to ordain them.

Later in the year, namely, on the 10th day of August, 1780, the Rev. John Wesley sent the following letter to Bishop Lowth :

“MY LORD: Some time since, I received your lordship’s favor, for which I return your lordship my sincere thanks. Those persons did not apply to

the society, because they had nothing to ask of them. They wanted no salary for their minister; they were themselves able and willing to maintain him. They therefore applied, by me, to your lordship, as members of the Church of England, and desirous so to continue, begging the favor of your lordship, after your lordship had examined him, to ordain a pious man, who might officiate as their minister.

“But your lordship observes, ‘There are three ministers in that country already.’ True, my lord; but what are three, to watch over all the souls in that extensive country? Will your lordship permit me to speak freely? I dare not do otherwise. I am on the verge of the grave, and know not the hour when I shall drop into it. Suppose there were threescore of those missionaries in the country, could I in conscience recommend these souls to their care? Do they take any care of their own souls? If they do (I speak it with concern!) I fear they are almost the only missionaries in America that do. My lord, I do not speak rashly; I have been in America, and so have several with whom I have conversed; and both I and they know what manner of men the far greater part of these are. They are men who have neither the power of religion nor the form; men that lay no claim to piety, nor even decency. Give me leave, my lord, to speak more freely still; perhaps it is the last time I shall trouble your lordship. I know your lordship’s abilities and extensive learn-

ing. I believe, what is far more, that your lordship fears God. I have heard that your lordship is unfashionably diligent in examining the candidates for holy orders; yea, that your lordship is generally at the pains of examining them yourself. *Examining them!* In what respect? Why, whether they understand a little Latin and Greek, and can answer a few trite questions in the science of divinity! Alas, how little does this avail! Does your lordship examine whether they serve Christ or Belial? whether they love God or the world? whether they ever had any serious thoughts about heaven or hell? whether they have any real desire to save their own souls, or the souls of others? If not, what have they to do with holy orders? and what will become of the souls committed to their care? My lord, I do by no means despise learning; I know the value of it too well. But what is this, particularly in a Christian minister, compared to piety? What is it in a man that has no religion? ‘As a jewel in a swine’s snout.’

“Some time since, I recommended to your lordship a plain man, whom I had known above twenty years, as a person of deep, genuine piety, and of unblamable conversation. But he neither understood Greek nor Latin; and he affirmed, in so many words, that he believed it was his duty to preach, whether he was ordained or no. I believe so too. What became of him since, I know not; but I suppose he received Presbyterian ordination, and I cannot blame

him if he did. He might think any ordination better than none.

“ I don’t know that Mr. Hoskins had any favor to ask of the society. He asked the favor of your lordship to ordain him, that he might minister to a little flock in America. But your lordship did not see good to ordain him ; but your lordship did see good to ordain, and send into America, other persons who knew something of Greek and Latin, but who knew no more of saving souls than of catching whales.

“ In this respect, also, I mourn for poor America ; for the sheep scattered up and down therein. Part of them have no shepherds at all, particularly in the northern colonies ; and the case of the rest is little better, for their own shepherds pity them not. They cannot, for they have no pity on themselves. They take no thought or care about their own souls.

“ Wishing your lordship every blessing from the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, I remain, my lord,

“ Your lordship’s dutiful son and servant.”

This letter shows that Wesley had solicited ordination for preachers for America, that he argued from his personal knowledge of some of the Church missionaries and the needs of the people in that distant country, and yet, though those whom he proposed did not ask for support from the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge in Foreign Parts, and

though they applied "as members of the Church of England" and desired "so to continue," he could not persuade the bishop to give them ordination.

There was, therefore, no use looking to the bishops of the Established Church for the requisite assistance. Further, in the very year to which we refer, and at this very time, Dr. Seabury, of Connecticut, was in England seeking consecration as a bishop for Connecticut. He had arrived in London on the 7th of July, 1783, and yet up to this time had not secured consecration. He was baffled by one objection after another. He was informed that he could not be ordained unless he took the oath of allegiance and supremacy, which as an American citizen he could not do. At last it was discovered that the bishops would expose themselves to the statute of *præmunire*, if they ordained him without an act of Parliament. Dr. Seabury then sought the passage of an act by Parliament, but when the act was passed it merely authorized the Bishop of London to admit foreign candidates to the orders of deacon and priest, but gave no permission to consecrate a bishop for any of the American States.* So the doctor was unsuccessful again, and, in fact, never did receive consecration from the English bishops.

It is possible that Wesley knew of Dr. Seabury's visit, his difficulties, and his failures. If he did, he must have realized how utterly impossible would be

* Beardsley's *Life of Bp. Seabury*. Third Ed., Boston, 1882, p. 133.

his mission if he now asked ordination for his preachers. The same legal objections would be urged ; and even if the English bishops would have ordained some of his American preachers if they had come to England it was practically impossible for them to come. But there was no reason to believe they would ordain them if they did cross the ocean.

Indeed, a Methodist had come from America and had been refused ordination. This was Cornelius Winter, who accompanied Whitefield on his last voyage to America. After Whitefield's death he returned to London with the hope of obtaining ordination. He had letters, including one from Wright, the governor of Georgia, recommending him to influential persons in England for ordination, that he might return and prosecute Whitefield's favorite plans of missionary labor among the negroes and Indians. Applications were made to the Bishop of London, and an interview was secured, but the prelate repulsed him as a Whitefield Methodist. Benjamin Franklin, who was then in London representing American affairs, used his influence for him, but all was in vain. That the colonies were rebellious seemed to have some effect, but the worst objection was that Winter was Methodistic. Said the bishop : " You have been a preacher with Mr. Whitefield, which is illegal. When you return to America let me know ! " To which Winter replied, " My lord, I cannot think of returning without ordination."

“Very well,” rejoined the bishop, with a significant bow; “and thus they parted till the day of judgment.” *

Wesley might have turned to the Dissenters, but every churchman would have said that a Dissenting ordination was no better than one Wesley could himself give. Wesley, however, had long before reached the point where he could recognize the validity of a presbyterial ordination, and he believed he had as good a right to ordain as those who were called bishops.

The year before, an event had occurred which may have had something to do in determining his course. Tyerman expresses it so well that we will quote verbatim from him. He says: “The Methodists under the care of the Countess of Huntingdon stood in the same relation to the Church of England that the Methodists under Wesley did. They *varied*, not *dissented*, from the Church. Recently, however, there had been a formal and avowed secession. Many of Lady Huntingdon’s chapels were supplied by ordained clergymen, and, among others, a large building in Spafields, previously known as the Pantheon. This edifice stood in the parish of Clerkenwell, of which the Rev. William Sellon was minister. Mr. Sellon claimed the right of appointing ministers and clerks to the Spafields chapel; also the right of himself to officiate within its walls as often as he

* Stevens’s *History of Methodism*, vol. ii, p. 65.

liked. He further demanded the sum of £40 a year, in consideration of his permitting two of the countess's preachers to occupy the said chapel; also all the sacramental collections; and four collections yearly, for the benefit of the children of the charity school of Clerkenwell parish; and, finally, that, for the due performance of these demands, the proprietors should sign a bond for £1,000.

“Of course, the proprietors refused to comply with such demands. Mr. Sellon then instituted a suit in the consistorial court of the Bishop of London, and cited the Revs. Messrs. Jones and Taylor, the officiating clergymen, and both of them ordained, to answer for their irregularity in preaching in a place not episcopally consecrated, and for carrying on divine worship there, contrary to the wish of the minister of the parish. Verdicts were obtained against them. The question was then removed to the ecclesiastical courts; and was again decided against the ministers of the countess, and in favor of Mr. Sellon, who obtained the name of Sanballat.

“This was a momentous matter. Hitherto Romaine, Venn, and others had preached for the countess; but now, as ordained clergymen, in danger of prosecution, they had to withdraw their services; and some of the most important chapels were left without supplies. The crisis was serious. The countess took counsel with her friends, and, at length, it was determined that Messrs. Wills and Taylor should for

mally secede from the Church of England, and should take upon themselves to ordain others; both of them had received episcopal ordination themselves, both were scholars and able preachers, and Mr. Wills had married Miss Wheeler, the countess's niece. Accordingly, these two ministers issued an address to the archbishops and bishops of the Church of England, stating that, because they could not, as clergymen of the Established Church, continue preaching to their present congregations without 'knowingly and willfully opposing the Church's laws,' they had resolved to secede peaceably, and to put themselves under the protection of the Toleration Act.

"Here then was a formal Methodist secession from the Established Church. But more than this, on March 9, 1783, these two seceding clergymen began to do what Wesley did eighteen months afterward—they held their first ordination. This was in Spafford's chapel. The service commenced at 9 A. M., and lasted about seven hours. The names of the six young men then set apart to the Christian ministry were, Thomas Jones, Samuel Beaufoy, Thomas Cannon, John Johnson, William Green, and Joel Abraham Knight. During the service Mr. Wills addressed the congregation, assigned his reasons for believing that he had the right to ordain; namely, that presbyters and bishops were the same order, and that, as he and Mr. Taylor had been ordained presbyters, they had really been ordained bishops, and

had as much right to ordain others as any bishop in the land.

“Wesley was acquainted with all this, though he never mentions it. For aught he knew, an action might be commenced against himself and the other clergymen preaching in the City Road, West Street, and elsewhere, similar to that which had been successfully prosecuted against the Countess of Huntingdon’s preachers at Spafields. It was time to look about. He held exactly the same views respecting presbyters and bishops that had been publicly avowed by Messrs. Wills and Taylor.” *

What was to be done had to be done quickly. Wesley was in declining years, and the American Methodists were restless. It was a question between letting the American preachers ordain themselves, or their receiving the recognition and authorization implied in ordination through the acknowledged head of Methodism.

As already stated, he had refrained from exercising the right he believed he possessed for England, where all the parishes were provided with clergymen and the country had a State Church, but the case of America was different. The colonies had become independent of the mother country, and the United States had no national Church.

He felt that he would not be violating any law if he ordained ministers for America. English law had

* Tyerman’s *Wesley*, vol. iii, pp. 430–432.

no control, and the Church of England had no sway in the United States. He felt that he was free to do for the United States what he did not feel free to do for England. He determined to ordain Whatcoat and Vasey, and so send three ordained men to America.

Mr. Pawson, one of Wesley's prominent preachers in England, says: "I believe, Mr. Wesley's first thought of ordaining arose out of the bishop of London refusing to ordain a preacher for America." * His purpose to ordain appears to have been communicated to a few of the preachers when the Conference met in Leeds in 1784.

Tyerman says: "Mr. Pawson, in his manuscript memoir of Dr. Whitehead, relates that ordination was first proposed by Wesley himself in select committee of consultation. Pawson was a member and was present. He writes: 'The preachers were astonished when this was mentioned, and, to a man, opposed it. But I plainly saw that it would be done, as Mr. Wesley's mind appeared to be quite made up.' "

It should be remembered that though he allowed the preachers in the Conference sessions to debate questions with the greatest freedom, and though he had a select few with whom he consulted on very important matters, his decision was final even against a unanimous sentiment in opposition. It is also to be remembered that his assertion of his right to ordain

* Manuscript letter quoted in Tyerman's *Life of Wesley*, vol. iii, p. 443.

† Tyerman's *Life of Wesley*, vol. iii, p. 428.

was no new assumption adopted after old age had brought on imbecility, for he had held it for thirty-eight years, and at this time he was a man of great mental vigor. Thirty-eight years before, on the road to Bristol, Wesley had read Lord King's work on the Primitive Church, and that had settled him in the conviction that presbyters and bishops were the same order, and that, consequently, presbyters had the same right to ordain. Now he goes again to Bristol to carry out the logical sequence of such views. It was not the rash impulse of inconsiderate youth or the weak yielding of aged imbecility, but the mature judgment of nearly forty years' standing and of one who had passed the period of ordinary earthly ambition.

The notes in his Journal are very brief. He had been at Newport, and he says, Saturday, August 28: "Being informed the boat would pass at eight, we hastened to the New Passage; but we were time enough, for it did not set out till past six in the evening. However, we got into the boat about seven, and before nine reached Bristol. Tuesday, 31.—Dr. Coke, Mr. Whatcoat, and Mr. Vasey came down from London, in order to embark for America. Wednesday, Sept. 1.—Being now clear in my own mind, I took a step which I had long weighed in my mind, and appointed Mr. Whatcoat and Mr. Vasey to go and serve the desolate sheep in America." *

This is the record he makes in his Journal of the

* Wesley's Works, Journal, Amer. Ed., vol. iv, p. 602.

ordination of Whatcoat and Vasey. He says he "had long weighed" this action, and now was clear in his own mind. He sends them with full ministerial powers "to serve the desolate sheep in America" who were without the sacraments. Now, who ordained them? Not Mr. Wesley alone, but Mr. Wesley assisted by two other presbyters who had received episcopal ordination in the Established Church. These men were the Rev. Dr. Coke and the Rev. James Creighton.*

About six years before this, when he was serving a parish church, Mr. Creighton thus wrote Mr. Wesley: "Could I once open a door here for the Methodist preachers, I should willingly go to any part of the globe that God should call me to. Were I near you, I should be too happy to fill the place of your assistant."† One year before taking part in this ordination he had entered the Methodist itinerancy in connection with Wesley.‡

It will be asked whether Wesley, assisted by these two presbyters, had a right to ordain these ministers. First, it may be well to pause and consider what Wesley had been doing in the way of giving authority to preachers of the Gospel for over forty years. During that time he had "chosen and sent" many men to preach, and he had set them apart with a for-

* Tyerman's *Life of Wesley*, vol. iii, p. 434.

† *Methodist Magazine*, 1788, p. 608.

‡ Bishop Simpson's *Cyclo. of Methodism*. Fourth Revised Ed.

mality amounting to a practical *de facto* ordination, with the exception of the laying on of hands and the authorization to administer the sacraments. Now, if he had the right to authorize them to preach, why had he not an equal right to authorize them to do full ministerial work? A number of Wesley's preachers had for a long time held that, "as divinely called preachers of Christ's religion," they "might be permitted to administer ordinances which that religion solemnly enjoined," especially as the Methodists, "in many instances, had been repelled from the sacramental table in the church, and had been driven to the alternative of either receiving the Lord's Supper in Dissenting chapels (where such an irregularity might be permitted), or of absolutely committing sin by neglecting one of the most important ordinances of the Christian system." * And some of the preachers did exercise what they believed to be their right to administer the sacraments in view of their rank as regular Methodist preachers. Thus, in 1760, Charles Wesley wrote to his brother: "Three preachers, whom we thought we could have depended upon, have taken upon them to administer the sacrament without ordination, and without acquainting us, or even yourself, of it beforehand. Why may not all the preachers do the same, if each is to judge of his own right to do it? . . . That the rest will soon follow their example I believe, because (1) they think they may

* Tyerman's *Life of Wesley*, vol. ii, p. 200.

do it with impunity; (2) because a large majority imagine they have a right, as preachers, to administer the sacraments; (3) because they have betrayed an impatience to separate. . Even Mr. Crisp says, he would give the sacraments if you bade him.” *

Now, if Mr. Wesley was right in giving men the authority to preach, how could it be wrong for him to give them authority to administer the sacraments?

The validity of the ordination of Whatcoat and Vasey will appear further from the following considerations:

First, because those who ordained were presbyters, and presbyters had power of ordination. In the early Christian Church the presbyters and bishops were the same, and ordaining was done by the presbyters. The parity of presbyters and bishops is clearly taught in the New Testament. The right of presbyters to ordain and the validity of presbyterial ordination were admitted by the English reformers and the standard writers of the Church of England. Mr. Wesley had been convinced by the writings of Lord King and Bishop Stillingfleet, and by the New Testament, that presbyters and bishops were the same order and had the same right to ordain. In giving ordination, therefore, he was sustained by the New Testament, the practice of the early Christian Church, and the teachings of the founders of the Protestant

* Jackson's *Life of Charles Wesley*, vol. ii, p. 180.

Reformed or national Church of England, and by later English writers.

The ordination was not by a single individual, for two other presbyters were associated with him, and the demand of the High Churchmen was met by the canonical number of three presbyters, all of whom took part in the ordination.

Second, if it be asserted that there must be a bishop in order to make an ordination (a point which, of course, is not to be admitted), then the answer is that the Rev. John Wesley was in fact a bishop. Taking the original idea, that every presbyter was a bishop, then he, being a presbyter, was a bishop. Taking the secondary idea, that a bishop was a presbyter who presided over presbyters, then he was a bishop, for he presided over presbyters; not only those of his preachers who were literally seniors or elders because of their age or length of ministerial service, but also those who had received episcopal ordination; for among those over whom he presided were those whom even a High Churchman would pronounce regularly ordained. Taking the word bishop as meaning overseer, then he was most emphatically a bishop, for he was the overseer of a large number of ministers and a large number of congregations, both in Europe and America.

One who will turn to the definition of bishop and episcopal government which he gave in 1745 will see that even then he perceived that he was a true

bishop, and that he was exercising episcopal jurisdiction; and forty years after that he held the same view, and said: "I firmly believe I am a scriptural ἐπίσκοπος, as much as any man in England or in Europe." *

It should be observed, however, that he did not consider himself any thing more than a presbyter-bishop, and that he viewed the ordination as a presbyterial ordination. We have stated the fact that he was a true scriptural bishop merely to meet the demand of those who think nothing valid but episcopal ordination; but whatever virtue there was in this ordination Wesley rested it on the fact that he was a presbyter, and that those who assisted him in ordaining were presbyters also.

But it may be said that this would have been legitimate enough if Wesley had not been a clergyman of the Established Church, and had belonged to some other body.

This implies that the party who presents the objection concedes that episcopal ordination is not necessary, and that presbyters can give a valid ordination. This being so, we may dismiss the claim for exclusively episcopal orders, and so simplify the inquiry. It would, then, have been a valid ordination, according to the objector, had they not continued in connection with the Church of England.

It will be admitted that they were still presbyters,

* *Methodist Magazine*, 1786, p. 50.

and, as far as that goes, they had as presbyters the right to ordain. They had not lost their rank, and hence had retained all the powers belonging to their order.

It will be admitted that Mr. Wesley had not been formally expelled from the Anglican Church, neither had he formally resigned ; but his connection with the Church of England was, in fact, more nominal than real. He was not a clergyman with parish, and he was not actually under the control of any bishop of the Established Church.

According to Bishop Porteus, in the case of Dr. Draper,* a minister could not be “a Methodist in the morning and a Church of England man in the afternoon,” and that one who preached “in any chapel that is not sanctioned and allowed by the ecclesiastical laws of the realm,” and who educated young men to preach “without episcopal ordination,” had “separated himself,” and was not “a member of the Church of England, but, what is strictly and properly so called, a Methodist.” Now all this John Wesley had done, and, according to this episcopal ruling, no matter what Mr. Wesley may have imagined as to his relation to the State Church, he had separated himself from the Church and belonged to the Methodists.

This was equally true in regard to Coke and Creighton, the two presbyters who assisted in the ordination of Whatecoat and Vasey. It is true that they had not been formally excluded, and that they had not

* *Life of Porteus*, pp. 267, 269.

formally resigned, but they were guilty of the supposed irregularities to which Bishop Porteus refers, and which he deemed practical separation. It is true they held a sort of relation to the Established Church, but they were actual Methodist itinerants in connection with Mr. Wesley. They were not serving parishes as Church of England clergymen, but were assisting Mr. Wesley as ordained Methodist preachers, and were connected with the Methodist Conference.

However, it makes little difference how these involved matters may be regarded. As a matter of fact, Wesley was the chief of a great religious organization and the head of a great ecclesiastical body, with its preachers and congregations; and, though he called himself a presbyter of the Church of England, it was as the head of Methodism that he ordained ministers for America, and it was because he was the head and overseer of Methodism that the two presbyters who assisted him participated in that ordination.

That his double relation was peculiar may be alleged, and that he may have been inconsistent may be admitted, without destroying the fact that it was as the head of Methodism he ordained Methodist preachers. If the authorities of the State Church did not eject him there seemed to him no practical reason why he should exclude himself. As the Rev. Richard Watson says: "If its spiritual governors did not choose to censure and disown him for denying the figment of the uninterrupted succession which he openly said

‘he knew to be a fable;’ for maintaining that bishops and priests were originally one order only; nor, finally, for proceeding to act upon that principle by giving orders, it would be hard to prove that he was under any moral obligation to withdraw from the Church. The bishops did not institute proceedings against him, and why should he formally renounce them altogether?” *

Third, then the ordination was valid, because Mr. Wesley was the proper and recognized authority among the Methodists to authorize men to perform the functions of the Christian ministry. The article of the Church of England which treats “of ministering in the congregation” is as follows: “It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called and sent to execute the same. And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation, to call and send ministers into the Lord’s vineyard.”

According to this article, the authority that can call and send a man to preach can also authorize him to minister the sacraments. That being the case, Mr. Wesley, who had been calling and sending men to preach, had also the same right to empower them to exercise the full ministerial function. He was the

* Watson’s *Life of Wesley*, Amer. Ed., 1836, p. 246.

one who for nearly half a century "had public authority given unto" him "in the congregation to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard," and, therefore, according to this article, those ministers ought to be judged "lawfully called and sent."

This authority had been conceded him by common consent in the Conference and congregation of Methodism for nearly fifty years. Wesley did not compel them to come to him or stay with him, but they voluntarily came and remained, and acknowledged his authority. He was the chief and the sole authority that ultimately decided questions. He recognized and authorized the ministers. He appointed them preachers and assigned them their places as pastors. The peculiar initiation and growth of Methodism made him the governing power, and his power was acknowledged both publicly and privately.

He was the head of the *ecclesia*. He was the Church himself. The pope of Rome could hardly claim to be the Church more fully than Wesley was the Church as far as the congregations of Methodism were concerned. Wesley was as much the primate of all Methodism in Europe and America as the Archbishop of Canterbury was of all England.

He was the authority in Methodism that had power "to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard," and, according to the principle involved in the Anglican article, he was the proper authority to empower the same to administer the sacraments;

and, therefore, as Whatcoat and Vasey, already preachers, were by this authority authorized to administer the sacraments, their ordination was valid, and those who believe in the English article "ought to judge" them "lawfully called and sent." As we have already seen, this very article was framed so as to recognize as valid the ministry of those who had not received episcopal ordination.

Fourth, the ordination of Whatcoat and Vasey was valid on the ground of necessity. This reason alone would be sufficient.

That there was extreme necessity for ordained ministers among the Methodists in America has been fully shown. Wesley had, therefore, before him their need and his need. They were without the sacraments, and he could not secure episcopal ordination for preachers who were willing to go to America.

It was a case of extremity. The Americans ought not to be left in that distress, and the American Methodists looked to him as their head to help them. Either they must be left amid their distress and divisions to decide for themselves, or the authorization must issue from him whom they all revered.

It was a case of extreme necessity, and the ecclesiastical authorities of the Anglican Church had frequently recognized the justice of this plea. Even Saravia, the intimate friend and confidential adviser of Hooker, though he maintained that ordinations ought to be by bishops, admitted that in cases of neces-

sity "*a presbyter clearly may ordain presbyters.*" He also says: "Although I am of opinion that ordinations of ministers of the Church properly belong to bishops, yet necessity causes that when they are wanting, and cannot be had, *orthodox presbyters can, in case of necessity, ordain a presbyter*; which thing, although it is not in accordance with the order received from the times of the apostles, *yet is excused by the necessity* of the case, which causes that *in such a state of things a presbyter may be a bishop.*"* This was the candid confession of this Spanish-born Church of England divine. Though he maintained the divine right of bishops, yet he recognized the divinity, so to speak, of the law of necessity. The case he supposed is the one Wesley had to meet, for no bishop could be had. Then, says Saravia, "*Orthodox presbyters can, in case of necessity, ordain a presbyter.*" That is what the three presbyters—Wesley, Coke, and Creighton—had done. And, says Saravia, such an act "is excused by the necessity of the case, which causes that *in such a state of things a presbyter may be a bishop,*" and so necessity made the *presbyter Wesley a bishop*, and he had, as bishop, the right to ordain. If such an extreme High Churchman would concede so much it is hardly necessary to look further, but we will cite one other authority.

Hooker thus states the propositions of certain per-

* Trans. in Goode's *Rule of Faith*, vol. ii, p. 277, from Sarav., *Defens. Tract*, pub. in Lat. in 1611.

sons : “ Now whereas hereupon some do infer that no ordination can stand but only such as is made by bishops, which have had their ordination likewise by other bishops before them, till we come to the very apostles of Christ themselves,” etc. Referring to this, he remarks : “ To this we answer that there may be sometimes very just and sufficient reason to allow ordination made without a bishop. As the ordinary course is ordinarily in all things to be observed, so it may be, in some cases, not unnecessary that we decline from the ordinary ways. Men may be extraordinarily, yet allowably, two ways admitted unto spiritual functions in the Church. One is when God himself doth of himself raise up any whose labor he useth without requiring that men should authorize them ; but then he doth ratify their calling by manifest signs and tokens himself from heaven. Another extraordinary kind of vocation is when the exigence of necessity doth constrain to leave the usual ways of the Church, which otherwise we would willingly keep : where the Church must needs have some ordained, and neither hath nor can have possibly a bishop to ordain ; in case of such necessity, the ordinary institution of God hath given oftentimes, and may give, place.” *

This great Anglican authority, though he preferred episcopal ordination, admitted “ that there may be sometimes very just and sufficient reason to allow or-

* Hooker's *Eccl. Pol.*, book vii, chap. xiv, § 11.

dination made without a bishop." But what could be a more pressing urgency than the condition of the Methodists in America? He admits that "in some cases" it may be "necessary that we decline from the ordinary ways." Surely Wesley had reached such a case. Hooker further concedes that men may be "admitted unto spiritual functions in the Church" "without requiring that men should authorize them;" for example, "when God himself doth of himself raise up any whose labor he useth;" when, as in the case of many of the Methodist preachers, God "doth ratify their calling by manifest signs and tokens," as he did in the conversion and moral transformation of tens of thousands under their ministry. According to this passage from Hooker, such men were qualified to administer the sacraments without any human ordination.

The second exception which Hooker allows is "when the exigence of necessity doth constrain to leave the usual ways," "where the Church must needs have some ordained, and neither hath nor can have possibly a bishop to ordain." Then the ordinary institution is to give way. This was precisely Wesley's case, and the law of necessity, even according to Anglican authorities, justifies him in his course.

Hooker also says, in his third book: "Unto the complete form of Church polity much may be requisite which the Scripture teacheth not, and much which it hath taught become unrequisite, sometime

because we need not use it, sometime also because we cannot. In which respect, for mine own part, although I see that certain Reformed Churches, the Scottish especially and French, have not that which best agreeth with the sacred Scripture, I mean the government that is by bishops, inasmuch as both those churches are fallen under a different kind of regiment; which to remedy it is for the one altogether too late, and too soon for the other during their present affliction and present trouble.* This their defect and imperfection I had rather lament in such a case than exagitate, considering that men oftentimes, without any fault of their own, may be driven to want that kind of polity or regiment which is best, and to content themselves with that which either the irremediable error of former times or the necessity of the present hath cast upon them."†

The Methodists had the right to have the sacraments administered by their own ministers, but we present the law of necessity because that was what determined Wesley's action, and Wesley, as a presbyter at the head of Methodism, was conscious of the possession of the right to ordain, though he had long hesitated to use it.

He had not used it for England because of his old predilection for the Establishment and his extreme

* *The Civil War in France*. The first part of Hooker's work was licensed to the press March 9, 1592-3.

† Hooker's *Eccl. Pol.*, book iii, chap. xi, § 16.

interpretation of English law; but he felt that now, especially under the pressure of necessity, he could grant ordination for America, where there was no Established Church and where English statutes did not apply.

There is a fifth reason for considering the ordination of Whatcoat and Vasey valid, and that is the right which springs from the true idea of ordination. The difficulty with some who reason on this subject is their notion that in ordination there is some mysterious influence or miraculous power imparted, and that this descends through the touch of those who received it from others, who in turn received it through an unbroken line stretching back to the apostles.

Wesley said, "The uninterrupted succession I know to be a fable which no man ever did or can prove;"* and we have shown that Church of England writers have admitted in substance that the succession might be interrupted, and that then valid ordination could be given by those who were not in the episcopate, and that, in an emergency, even laymen would constitute a church and, consequently, could ordain a ministry. If then, the succession was ever broken, or could be broken, and yet there be a true ministry, it follows that, whatever propriety a successional form may have, it has in it nothing absolutely necessary. It further follows, if the continuity can be broken, and yet there be a valid ministry, that there

* *Methodist Magazine*, 1786, p. 50.

is no necessary mysterious successional influence in ordination, for, if there was, at the first break it would be forever lost, and there could thereafter never be a valid ordination. If broken, a new series would have to be begun, and Anglican writers admit that in cases of necessity it could be commenced by those who themselves did not, on the theory of believers in apostolic succession, possess any grace received from the apostles. In other words, even according to this theory, ordination does not depend upon successional grace.

Ordination is not, therefore, in a descent of any mysterious successional influence that depends upon a tactual succession, or any other kind of succession, running back to the apostles, or through any number of generations, or running back at all. Ordination is simply the formal act of elevating an individual into an order which carries with it the power to administer a sacrament, said act of elevation being done by those who in the congregation have the power so to elevate. The elevation or ordination is in the formal recognition and authorization by the power that has the right to choose and send, and this elevation may be with much or little form. In other words, ordination is not so much in descent as in consent. It is not in the descent of any miraculous influence through the touch of the hands, but rather in the consent of the proper authority in the church, that the individual may administer a sacrament, as well as preach the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is on this prin-

ciple that the Preface to the Church of England Ordinal, speaking of those who received orders, says, "they were first called, tried, examined, and known to have such qualities as are requisite for the same," and "were approved and admitted thereunto by lawful authority."

In Methodism, John Wesley was "the lawful authority;" he had tried Whatcoat and Vasey, and knew that they had the requisite qualities, and his authorization, accompanied by prayer and the laying on of hands by three presbyters, constituted a legitimate ordination.

But it may be objected that the service was performed in a private house. Well, it would be absurd to suppose that Wesley could have obtained the cathedral church for that purpose, and in the opinion of High-Churchmen a private room was just as good as a Dissenters' chapel.

The fact is, the ordination was not for England, and did not require English publicity. It was not for England, but for distant and independent America, where the English State Church had no dominion.

Then the question is one as to deed, not as to place. If it be admitted that the ordination itself was valid had it been in some other place, for example, the cathedral, that will be sufficient. Who knows where the apostles ordained the elders? Was it necessary for them to go into the temple at Jerusalem, or into an orthodox Jewish synagogue? They may have ordained in the

“upper room” at Jerusalem, or in a “hired house,” such as Paul had in Rome. Certainly it was not in any great cathedral or splendid edifice with all the appointments of a modern church. It might have been in the open air or in some secluded spot on the summit of a mountain. The place would not make any difference, and the ordination in the hired house or in the secluded spot would have been just as valid as if it had taken place before the multitudes in the temple. So Wesley’s ordination of Whatcoat and Vasey would not lose its validity because of the humble place where it was performed. The only question is as to the proper authority to give the authorization. In this instance, Wesley, the recognized authority of Methodism, was present with witnesses, and that was sufficient for the purpose.

We have already mentioned that Dr. Seabury, who had been a Church of England clergyman in Connecticut, was in England seeking consecration as a bishop. He had been selected by a secret meeting of about ten clergymen, held at a private house in the village of Woodbury, Conn., “and it was so secret as to be known only to the clergy.” This small number, in secret conclave, “without a formal election,” “selected two persons, the Rev. Jeremiah Leaming and the Rev. Samuel Seabury, as suitable, either of them, to go to England and to obtain, if possible, episcopal consecration.”* The affair was kept secret,

* Beardsley’s *Life of Bishop Seabury*. Third Ed., 1882, pp. 77, 78.

and Dr. Seabury went to England, but, as we have seen, could not obtain consecration from the English bishops. Failing here, he went to Scotland, where there were a number of non-juring bishops, who, because they had refused to take the oath of allegiance to the English sovereign, were by act of Parliament deprived of their sees and benefices. They were, therefore, bishops without dioceses and under ban. From them he received consecration. Whether they had a legal right to consecrate, and, consequently, whether Dr. Seabury did receive a valid consecration, are questions which by some have been answered in the negative; but at this point we are not concerned with such issues. It is important in this connection, however, to note that the consecration of Dr. Seabury took place not in a cathedral, but in a private house.

The severe penal laws under which the non-juring bishops in Scotland and their clergy fell forbade them to officiate except in private dwellings and to a very limited number of persons. The law made the limit "four persons besides those of the household," though, no doubt, in later years more assembled. It was in a private dwelling-house, back in Longacre, a narrow lane of the city of Aberdeen, "where public carriages never passed," and on the upper floor, that the Rev. Samuel Seabury, D.D., was consecrated on the 14th of November, 1784.*

* Beardsley's *Life of Bishop Seabury*. Third Ed., pp. 144, 145.

So, in the city of Bristol, on the 1st of September, 1784, about ten weeks before, the Rev. John Wesley transformed a room in a private house into a chapel, for the time being, and, assisted by regularly ordained presbyters, ordained Whatcoat and Vasey deacons, and the next day elders,* and their ordination in a private house stands on as good a basis as the consecration of the first Protestant Episcopal bishop for America.

Whether Wesley regretted his action, in ordaining the two ministers for the United States, is sufficiently answered by the fact that the next year he ordained three of his ministers for Scotland. In his Journal is this entry: "1785, Aug. 1.—Having, with a few select friends, weighed the matter thoroughly, I yielded to their judgment, and set apart three of our well tried preachers, John Pawson, Thomas Hanby, and Joseph Taylor, to minister in Scotland."

He ordained for Scotland on the same principle that he did for America, that is, because the Church of England had no control in either country. He held that he was a bishop and had the right to ordain, but he did not exercise that right for England because of the existence of the State Church.

Wesley explains how he came to ordain ministers for Scotland. He says: "After Dr. Coke's return from America, many of our friends begged I would consider the case of Scotland, where we had been laboring for many years, and had seen so little fruit of

* Stevens's *Hist. of the M. E. Church*, vol. ii, p. 166.

our labors. Multitudes, indeed, have set out well, but they were soon turned out of the way, chiefly by their ministers, either disputing against the truth, or refusing to admit them to the Lord's Supper, yea, or to baptize their children, unless they would promise to have no fellowship with the Methodists. Many who did so soon lost all they had gained, and became more the children of hell than before. To prevent this I at length consented to take the same step with regard to Scotland which I had done with regard to America." *

On the 19th of August, 1785, a few days after he had ordained the first ministers for Scotland, in replying to his brother Charles, Mr. Wesley said :

"For these forty years I have been in doubt concerning that question, What obedience is due to

‘Heathenish priests and mitred infidels?’ †

"I have from time to time proposed my doubts to the most pious and sensible clergymen I knew. But they gave me no satisfaction. Rather, they seemed to be puzzled.

"Obedience I always paid to the bishops, in obedience to the laws of the land. But I cannot see that I am under any obligation to obey them further than those laws require.

"It is in obedience to these laws that I have never exercised in England the power which I believe God

* *Methodist Magazine*, 1786, p. 678.

† Charles Wesley's verse.

has given me. I firmly believe I am a scriptural ἐπίσκοπος, as much as any man in England, or in Europe; for the uninterrupted succession I know to be a fable, which no man ever did or can prove. But this does in no wise interfere with my remaining in the Church of England.” *

To this Charles replied on the eighth of September, and said: “That you are a scriptural ἐπίσκοπος, or overseer, I do not dispute; and so is every minister who has the cure of souls.” †

At the Conference of 1786 Wesley ordained Joshua Keighley and Charles Atmore for Scotland, William Warrener for Antigua, and William Hammet for Newfoundland. In 1787 he ordained five others. In 1788, when Wesley was in Scotland, John Barber and Joseph Cownley received ordination at his hands; and at the ensuing Conference he ordained seven others, including Alexander Mather. On Ash Wednesday, 1789, he ordained Henry Moore and Thomas Rankin.

“This, we believe, completes the list of those upon whom Wesley laid his hands. In most instances, probably in all, they were ordained deacons on one day, and on the day following received the ordination of elders, Wesley giving to each letters testimonial.” ‡

* *Methodist Magazine*, 1786, p. 50.

† *Life of Charles Wesley*, vol. ii, p. 398.

‡ Tyerman's *Life of Wesley*, vol. iii, pp. 441, 442.

These facts show that it was not a sudden impulse that led him to ordain Whatcoat and Vasey, and that he did not subsequently regret it, for he kept on ordaining up almost to the time of his death, which occurred on the 2d of March, 1791, in his eighty-eighth year.

It may also be added that, though he generally used the term society, yet he regarded the Methodist society as a Church, and so termed it. As early as 1749, when, in his Conference, discussing a plan for the more intimate combination of his societies, he calls them "churches," and referring to their closer relation with the society in London, he says, "May not that in London, the mother church, consult for the good of all the churches?" * and, in his eighty-sixth year, after he had provided for the perpetuity of Methodism in Europe and America, and had ordained ministers for America and Scotland, he says: "I still aver, I have never read or heard of, either in ancient or modern history, any *other* Church which builds on so broad a foundation as the Methodists do; which requires of its members no conformity, either in opinions or modes of worship, but barely this one thing—to fear God and work righteousness." †

Thus in middle life and in old age he considered that the Methodists constituted a Church, and that he, as

* *Minutes of Conferences*, London, 1812. vol. i, p. 39.

† Wesley's Journal, Aug. 26, 1789, Works, vol. iv, p. 729.

the overseer of the preachers and congregations, was their bishop.

We have seen that Mr. Wesley designated Dr. Coke, Mr. Whatcoat, and Mr. Vasey to go to the United States, but he intended Dr. Coke to have a higher rank than the others. Heretofore he had called the preacher who had acted as his agent in America, in presiding over the other preachers, a general assistant; but the general assistants were unordained men. Now, when he sends an ordained man with similar powers of supervision, and also the power of ordination, he gives him a different title. He calls Coke a superintendent.

An interesting question here arises. Did Wesley originally intend any thing more in the case of Dr. Coke than a mere appointment? In other words, did he originally intend to formally consecrate him to the office of superintendent?

Before the Conference met in 1784 it does not appear that Wesley intended more than to appoint Coke to the charge of the work in America. At the Conference it would appear that he said enough to his committee of consultation to convince one, at least, that he intended ordaining some of the unordained preachers, but there is no evidence that, at that time, he intended any formal setting apart of Coke.

It is probable that it did not occur to Wesley that there was any necessity for applying any consecration

service to a clergyman who already was of as high an order as that which he himself possessed. Why would Wesley think it necessary? He did not mean to make Coke higher than himself. Wesley had not received any formal consecration to his position as overseer of the preachers and people since his ordination as a presbyter. Then why should he think it necessary for Coke, who was to have a similar office of supervision? He held that presbyters had the same right to ordain as bishops, and therefore, as Coke was already a presbyter, he needed nothing more for the purpose of giving a valid ordination.

Wesley claimed that he was a true *episcopos*, yet he had never had any formal setting apart beyond that of his ordination as presbyter, and it was not likely that he would think Coke needed any thing further of that character, even if Coke, like himself, was to be a true *episcopos*.* If he thought a presbyter was

* "Appointment to the episcopal office by the presbyters of a Church is sufficient (as far as the essentials are concerned) to entitle a presbyter to perform the duties of the episcopal function" (*Rule of Faith*, by Rev. William Goode, M.A., F.S.A., of Trinity College, Cambridge, Rector of Allhallows the Great and Less, London, vol. ii, pp. 258, 259). Morinus, one of the most learned divines of the Church of Rome, says: "St. Jerome testifies that, at Alexandria, from the time of Mark the evangelist to Dionysius, that is, for the space of nearly two hundred years, the bishops were inaugurated without any consecration, but the presbyters of Alexandria, when their bishop was dead, elected one of their own order, and belonging to their own Church, and placed him upon the higher throne and called him bishop. By which truly it most clearly appears that

a bishop without any further formality, he could not have supposed a further service was needed by Coke. He must have supposed that his appointment of Coke to the position of superintendent would be all that could be required to make him a presiding presbyter with power to oversee the work.

This is the only logical deduction from Wesley's premises. With him a presbyter had the same order as a bishop, and had the same right to ordain. Coke, being a presbyter, met the condition without needing any new service of consecration. With Wesley a bishop was a presbyter presiding over preachers and

neither Jerome nor the Alexandrines recognized that character by which a bishop is said to be above a presbyter, since no prayer, no ceremony, no form of words, was used over the presbyter elected. You will say, he mentions none, but it cannot hence be concluded that there was none, since it is certain that authors do not always relate every thing that takes place. This indeed is true, but the scope and words of St. Jerome do not admit of this objection. For he contends that a presbyter is the same as a bishop, and proves this from the peculiar and unusual custom of the Alexandrines, who make use of no consecration, no words to consecrate as a bishop the presbyter elected by them, but only place him in the throne and call him bishop." He also adduces other arguments to show that this was the meaning of Jérôme's words, and adds other testimonies to prove the fact stated. Again, in the same work, referring to the "Breviarium" of Liberatus, he says: "It clearly follows from it that, for at least two hundred years after Alexander, the presbyters of Alexandria, not the bishops, elected the patriarch; and that neither the presbyters, nor the bishops, nor any other persons, laid their hand on the person elected." (Quoted in Goode's *Rule of Faith and Practice*, London, 1855, vol. ii, 259, 260).

overseeing their work. Coke, as a superintendent, would be this without requiring any thing more. With such views Wesley could not think it necessary to apply to Coke a service that had never been applied to himself.

Notwithstanding this, it is nevertheless a fact that he did "set apart as a superintendent by the imposition of" his "hands and prayer (being assisted by other ordained ministers,) Thomas Coke, doctor of civil law," etc. How can this be explained? The explanation is in a letter which Dr. Coke wrote Wesley six days after the close of the Conference. It is as follows :

" August 9, 1784.

" HONORED AND DEAR SIR : The more maturely I consider the subject the more expedient it appears to me that the power of ordaining others should be received by me from you, by the imposition of your hands ; and that you should lay your hands on Brother Whatcoat and Brother Vasey for the following reasons : (1.) It seems to me the most scriptural way, and most agreeable to the practice of the primitive churches. (2.) I may want all the influence in America which you can throw into my scale. Mr. Brackenbury informed me at Leeds that he saw a letter from Mr. Asbury, in which he observed that he would not receive any person deputed by you, with any part of the superintendency of the work invested in him, or words which evidently implied so much.

I do not find the least degree of prejudice in my mind against Mr. Asbury ; on the contrary, I find a very great love and esteem, and am determined not to stir a finger without his consent, unless necessity obliges me, but rather to be at his feet in all things. But as the journey is long and you cannot spare me often, it is well to provide against all events ; and I am satisfied that an authority formally received from you will be fully admitted, and that my exercising the office of ordination without that formal authority may be disputed, and perhaps, on other accounts, opposed. I think you have tried me too often to doubt whether I will, in any degree, use the power you are pleased to invest me with farther than I believe absolutely necessary for the prosperity of the work.

“ In respect of my brethren Whatcoat and Vasey, it is very uncertain whether any of the clergy mentioned by Brother Rankin, except Mr. Jarratt, will stir a step with me in the work ; and it is by no means certain that even he will choose to join me in ordaining, and propriety and universal practice make it expedient that I should have two presbyters with me in this work. In short, it appears to me that every thing should be prepared, and every thing proper be done that can possibly be done, on this side the water. You can do all this in Mr. C——n’s house, in your chamber, and afterward (according to Mr. Fletcher’s advice) give us letters testimonial of the different offices with which you have been pleased

to invest us. For the purpose of laying hands on Brothers Whatcoat and Vasey, I can bring Mr. Creighton down with me, by which you will have two presbyters with you.

“In respect to Brother Rankin’s argument that you will escape a great deal of odium by omitting this, it is nothing. Either it will be known or not known. If not known, then no odium will arise; but if known, you will be obliged to acknowledge that I acted under your direction or suffer me to sink under the weight of my enemies, with perhaps your brother at the head of them. I shall intreat you to ponder these things.

“Your most dutiful

THOMAS COKE.” *

This is a very remarkable letter, and reveals many things which it is not our province here to consider. The solicitation of ordination for Whatcoat and Vasey is of no moment, for, as we have seen, it was evident that at the Conference Wesley’s mind was made up to grant it. The real point in the letter is the solicitation by Dr. Coke for some service for himself, and the reason presented is that he fears Asbury would not be willing to divide “any part of the superintendency of the work invested in him,” but supposes that he would admit Coke’s authority if it had been “formally received from” Wesley “by the imposition of” Wesley’s hands.

* Whitehead’s *Life of Wesley*, vol. ii, p. 417; Tyerman’s *Life of Wesley*, vol. iii, p. 429.

Now, did Asbury write such a letter as Mr. Brackenbury told Dr. Coke he had seen? It is not improbable. Asbury was the head of American Methodism, first by the choice of the American preachers, and recently by the formal appointment of Wesley. He had guided Methodism in America during the disturbances of the war, and, after the war, had held it together in spite of internal troubles. It is not, therefore, likely that he would be willing to have one who had never suffered and toiled in America, as he had, come over and entirely supersede him, or even to divide the superintendency with him.

His feeling is manifested in a letter dated West Jersey, September 20, 1783; a little less than a year before Wesley set apart Dr. Coke to the office of a superintendent. In this letter to Wesley, Asbury says:

“No person can manage the lay preachers here so well, it is thought, as one that has been at the raising of most of them. No man can make a proper change upon paper to send one here and another (there) without knowing the circuits and the gifts of all the preachers, unless he is always out among them. My dear sir, a matter of the greatest consequence now lies before you. If you send preachers to America, let them be proper persons. We are now united; all things go on well considering the storms and difficulties we have had to ride through. I wish men of the greatest understanding would write impartial

accounts, for it would be better for us not to have preachers than to be divided. This I know ; great men that can do good may do hurt if they should take the wrong road. I have labored and suffered much to keep the people and preachers together, and if I am thought worthy to keep my place I should be willing to labor and suffer till death for peace and union.” *

There was, therefore, some ground for the fear felt by Dr. Coke. Asbury had rights which were to be respected, and he was so popular with the preachers that even Dr. Coke, with all his scholarship and executive ability, would require the authority of Mr. Wesley to give him equal standing. That this authority might have been given without a special consecration is very plain to those who understand the great influence of Wesley, but the difficulty of the situation was made by Dr. Coke a reason why he should be formally set apart. If he was so set apart he thought it would give him prestige with the preachers and people in America, and so induce them to acknowledge his authority as superintendent, for they revered Wesley and obeyed his commands.

Wesley again yields to the practical, for it is a plea of practical utility that Coke presents. Holding the views he did, he could not think the service essential, but he concluded that it was proper. The consequence was that Wesley set apart Dr. Coke as a superintendent with the formalities of prayer and the

* Atkinson's *Centennial History of American Methodism*. pp 72, 73.

imposition of his hands, "being assisted by other ordained ministers," and gave him a written testimonial to that effect. "This was all that Wesley did, and all that Wesley meant." * "Wesley meant the ceremony to be a mere formality likely to recommend his delegate to the Methodists in America." † But it was fitting that there should be religious service in connection with the appointment of a minister to such an important mission, and it was an appropriate act that the octogenarian Wesley should with prayer and his blessing set apart and bid godspeed to Coke, who, though an Oxford Doctor of Laws, was not quite thirty-seven years of age. It was a beautiful scene, reminding one of an ancient patriarch tenderly blessing his beloved son as he was about to depart from home charged with some momentous undertaking.

Having appointed him and set him apart, Wesley gave him a testimonial letter which was Coke's certificate of his appointment as superintendent among "the people in the southern provinces of North America" who were under Wesley's care.

The letter is as follows :

"TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME: John Wesley, late Fellow of Lincoln College in Oxford, Presbyter of the Church of England, sendeth greeting. Whereas many of the people in the Southern

* Tyerman's *Life of Wesley*, vol. iii, p. 433.

† *Ibid.*, p. 434.

provinces of North America, who desire to continue under my care, and still adhere to the doctrines and discipline of the Church of England, are greatly distressed for want of ministers to administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, according to the usage of the same Church ; and whereas there does not appear to be any other way of supplying them with ministers :

“ Know all men, that I, John Wesley, think myself to be providentially called, at this time, to set apart some persons for the work of the ministry in America. And, therefore, under the protection of almighty God, and with a single eye to his glory, I have this day set apart as a superintendent, by the imposition of my hands, and prayer, (being assisted by other ordained ministers), Thomas Coke, doctor of civil law, a presbyter of the Church of England, and a man whom I judge to be well qualified for that great work. And I do hereby recommend him, to all whom it may concern, as a fit person to preside over the flock of Christ. In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and seal, this second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-four. JOHN WESLEY.”

Now, what did Wesley make Coke ? Did he intend to make him a bishop ? In the testimonial letter he calls Coke a presbyter, and declares that he was “ set apart as a superintendent.” What he gave

him, therefore, was a superintendency. But was this an episcopate ?

Wesley's definition of bishop was overseer ; but a superintendent is an overseer, and, therefore, according to the Wesleyan idea, a superintendent is a bishop. Nearly forty years before, at his Conference held in 1745, he gave with great explicitness his definition of bishop and bishopric, in describing the evolution of episcopal government from the individual congregation with its single pastor. In his mind a minister who had the charge of ministers serving congregations was "the bishop or overseer," and into this definition he never introduces or intimates the necessity of ordination or consecration. In his judgment it was the position, not the service, that made the bishop. According to the testimonial letter, Coke was not only called a superintendent, but he was to "*preside*" over the ministers and churches in America, and was, therefore, according to Wesley's definition of the word, a bishop.

He called this new officer a superintendent, but the question lies not in the name, but in the functions of the office. He may have preferred this name, first, because the word superintendent best expressed his simple idea of the true episcopate, and, secondly, because by this name he might avoid the misconceptions which might arise from the false and superstitious notions which had come down from the distant past and still adhered to the title bishop as used by many.

Wesley declared himself to be a true *episcopos*, or bishop, but he did not style himself a bishop, and did not permit others to address him by that title. Wesley was a bishop in the sense that he was an overseer of ministers, for he was the overseer both of ordained and unordained preachers. Coke was to be the superintendent or overseer of ministers, and hence he, likewise, was to be a bishop. It will be remembered that Protestant bishops on the Continent of Europe were called superintendents.

Another question should be considered : Did Wesley confer, or intend to confer, a higher order on Coke than that which he already possessed ? Coke was a presbyter before his appointment, and before he was set apart as a superintendent. Did Wesley confer, or understand Coke to receive a higher order by his appointment, or by the service used in setting him apart as a superintendent ? For reasons similar to those already given in regard to the service itself, we would infer that Wesley did not intend to confer any higher order on Coke.

It will be noticed that in the letters testimonial Wesley terms himself a presbyter. The ordained ministers who were associated with him were also presbyters. Trained as he had been, he could not mean to give a higher order than the givers had to bestow. It is not likely that he would propose to give a higher order than he himself possessed. Further, as Wesley was only a presbyter in order, it is not

likely that he would want to give Coke any thing higher. Even if presbyters could have given a higher order, still it is inconceivable that Wesley would want to make Coke his superior. On the contrary, the fact is that Wesley never treated Coke as a superior, but as a subordinate, and, as we shall see hereafter, felt that he had the right to control Coke and all the American superintendents, and, it would seem, even to remove them from their office at his pleasure. This certainly was not in harmony with Wesley's idea of the prerogatives of an order, but was treating the superintendency not as an order, but as an office.

It will be observed that, in the certificate he gave Dr. Coke, Wesley does not use the word "ordain," or any other word that would indicate that he considered it an "ordering" service. He appears to purposely avoid any word of that character, and simply uses the words "set apart," which would be proper when no order was conferred.

We are not left, however, to indefinite inferences, or even to such strong conclusions as those suggested. We have his positive declaration, and that in connection with this very occasion, that there was no higher order than that of presbyter. If, then, in his judgment there was no higher order, he could not intend to give Coke a higher order, for he was a presbyter at that time.

In his letter to the American Methodists and their superintendents he said: "Lord King's account

of the primitive Church convinced me many years ago that bishops and presbyters are the same order." That being the case, Wesley could not mean to give Coke the same order that he already had, and renders it absurd for any one to think that he meant to give a higher order when he knew that there was no higher order.

In the same letter he speaks of following "the Scriptures and the primitive Church," and his idea of bishops and presbyters in the Scriptures and in the primitive Church was that they were the same order. The conclusion, therefore, is irresistible that Wesley did not mean to confer, and that he did not confer, any order by appointment or by the service setting apart Dr. Coke to the superintendency. Coke, in the estimation of Wesley, had the highest order, and Wesley could not, therefore, give him one that was higher.

But it may be said that a formal service was used. Even if there was, that cannot make any difference. Ordering is not in the service, but in the intention and act of those who have the power to confer the order.

Then, again, even if any service could confer an order, there is nothing in the testimonial letter to prove that this one did. At this service there was prayer offered, but prayer for one does not necessarily imply an ordination. There was also the imposition of hands, but even the imposition of hands does not necessarily imply ordination. In the Script-

ures the imposition of hands is frequently mentioned without any idea of elevating to an order.

“When a Jewish father invoked a benediction on any of his family he laid his hands upon the head of the child; when a Jewish priest devoted an animal in sacrifice he laid his hand upon the head of the victim; and when a Jewish ruler invested another with office he laid his hand upon the head of the new functionary.” *

What is more to the point in question is the fact that Wesley did not consider that the imposition of hands was ordination. As far back as the 10th of September, 1756, almost twenty-eight years before, in a letter to the Rev. Mr. Clarke, he said: “When Paul and Barnabas *were separated for the work to which they were called this was not ordaining them.* St. Paul was ordained long before, and that not of man nor by man. It was only inducting him to the province for which our Lord had appointed him from the beginning. For this end the prophets and teachers fasted, prayed, and ‘laid their hands upon them;’ a rite which was used, *not in ordination only, but in blessing and on many other occasions.*” *

As Wesley did not deem that laying on of hands was ordination, we cannot call the imposition of hands in the case of Coke an ordination, or a service that gave Coke an order. Wesley says that hands were laid on

* Killen: *Ancient Church*, p. 71, sq.

† Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., vol. vii, p. 285.

Paul and Barnabas, but, he adds, "*This was not ordaining them. St. Paul was ordained long before.*" So, though hands were laid on Coke, "*this was not ordaining*" him; he "*was ordained long before.*" Wesley says that "Paul and Barnabas were *separated* for the work," but "*this was not ordaining them;*" and in reference to Coke he uses the equivalent phrase, "*set apart,*" and that "*was not ordaining*" him. Coke was "*set apart,*" not ordained by the service, and, therefore, received no order at all.

Wesley says, referring to St. Paul, that the ceremony "*was only inducting him to the province for which our Lord had appointed him;*" so in Coke's case the service was only inducting him into the official position to which he had been appointed.

Wesley, in this very relation, said, in substance, There is no higher order than that of presbyter; and, consequently, could not have given Coke a higher order, for he was already a presbyter. Coke was a presbyter before; he is a presbyter still. He has been "*set apart*" for a work, but there was no "*ordering*" force in the service. He was a presbyter; now he is a presbyter-superintendent, a presbyter to preside over presbyters as their overseer, and, in that sense, a bishop. He received not an order, but an office; and the appointment alone, without the service, would have given him that. The service made him nothing more than a presbyter, and when it was over he had nothing more than the office of superin-

tendent ; but, in view of the responsible duties which devolved upon him, and which he was going to discharge, it was eminently appropriate that he should be inducted into his office with religious service.

In regard to Wesley's relation to the episcopate of American Methodism, the main point with which we are concerned is as to his view at the time he appointed and set apart Dr. Coke as a superintendent. What he said and believed before, or what he said and believed at any subsequent time, is of comparatively little moment. What he believed and intended at that time is the important thing. What he did believe at that particular time he introduced into the letter which Dr. Coke was to present to the American Methodists. In that letter he says "that bishops and presbyters are the same order." So that the episcopate which he instituted had no higher order than that which a presbyter possessed, and, consequently, the superintendent was a presbyter-superintendent, and the episcopate was an office, and not an order.

Here we should introduce the letter of Mr. Wesley :

BRISTOL, *September* 10, 1784.

TO DR. COKE, MR. ASBURY, AND OUR BRETHREN IN NORTH AMERICA :

By a very uncommon train of providences, many of the provinces of North America are totally disjoined from the mother country, and erected into independent States. The English government has no authority over them, either civil or ecclesiastical, any more than over the States of Holland. A civil authority is exercised over them, partly by the Congress, partly by the provincial assemblies. But no one either exercises or

claims any ecclesiastical authority at all. In this peculiar situation, some thousands of the inhabitants of these States desire my advice, and, in compliance with their desire, I have drawn up a little sketch.

Lord King's account of the primitive Church convinced me, many years ago, that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain. For many years I have been importuned, from time to time, to exercise this right, by ordaining part of our traveling preachers. But I have still refused, not only for peace' sake, but because I was determined as little as possible to violate the established order of the national Church to which I belonged.

But the case is widely different between England and North America. Here there are bishops who have a legal jurisdiction; in America there are none, neither any parish minister, so that for some hundreds of miles together there is none either to baptize or to administer the Lord's Supper. Here, therefore, my scruples are at an end, and I conceive myself at full liberty, as I violate no order and invade no man's rights, by appointing and sending laborers into the harvest.

I have accordingly appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint superintendents over our brethren in North America; as also Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey to act as elders among them, by baptizing and administering the Lord's Supper. And I have prepared a liturgy, little differing from that of the Church of England (I think the best constituted national Church in the world), which I advise all traveling preachers to use on the Lord's day in all the congregations, reading the litany only on Wednesdays and Fridays, and praying extempore on all other days. I also advise the elders to administer the supper of the Lord on every Lord's day.

If any one will point out a more rational and scriptural way of feeding and guiding these poor sheep in the wilderness, I will gladly embrace it. At present, I cannot see any better method than that I have taken.

It has, indeed, been proposed to desire the English bishops to

ordain part of our preachers for America. But to this I object: (1) I desired the bishop of London to ordain one, but could not prevail. (2) If they consented, we know the slowness of their proceedings; but the matter admits of no delay. (3) If they would ordain them now, they would expect to govern them; and how grievously would this entangle us! (4) As our American brethren are now totally disentangled, both from the state and the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again, either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive Church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely set them free.*

JOHN WESLEY.

This is a very important production, and is worthy of close study. It is a summary of Wesley's reasons for the course he took in order to meet the necessities of the American Methodists. The basis of all his action is in his declaration "that bishops and presbyters are the same order."†

This shows why he, as a presbyter, undertook to ordain, and also that the only episcopate he believed in was one in which the bishop was a presbyter. It also states that the legal difficulties which had deterred him from ordaining before did not exist in relation to America, and that the emergency compelled him to act.

* Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., pp. 311, 312.

† The Rev. L. Tyerman, of London, and author of the large three-volume *Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Founder of the Methodists*, in a letter to the writer, dated June 1, 1886, says: "I am astonished how any one can doubt that Wesley considered bishops and presbyters to be of the same order in the face of Wesley's letter to Asbury, dated September 10, 1784."

Another interesting fact is that Wesley intended the American Methodists to use a liturgical service, and so he remarks, "I have prepared a liturgy, little differing from that of the Church of England, which I advise all the traveling preachers to use on the Lord's day in all the congregations, reading the litany only on Wednesdays and Fridays, and praying extempore on all other days."

This liturgy he entitled, *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in the United States of America. With Other Occasional Services*. It was a 12mo, and was first published in 1784. The Preface is as follows:

I believe there is no liturgy in the world, either in ancient or modern language, which breathes more of a solid, scriptural, rational piety than the Common Prayer of the Church of England; and though the main of it was compiled considerably more than two hundred years ago, yet is the language of it not only pure, but strong and elegant in the highest degree.

Little alteration is made in the following edition of it, except in the following instances:

1. Most of the holy days (so called) are omitted, as at present answering no valuable end.

2. The service of the Lord's day, the length of which has been often complained of, is considerably shortened.

3. Some sentences in the offices of baptism, and for the burial of the dead, are omitted; and,

4. Many psalms left out, and many parts of the others, as being highly improper for the mouths of a Christian congregation.

JOHN WESLEY.

BRISTOL, *September 9, 1784.* *

* See Wesley's Works, American Edition, vol. vii, pp. 580, 581.

This service was prepared in apparent haste, but it anticipated modern demands, especially in the matter of brevity, which churches using the Anglican liturgy have been striving to gain. Dr. Stevens goes so far as to say that "Wesley's abridgment of the Common Prayer was exceedingly well done; superior to that adopted by the Protestant Episcopal Church. It includes the very quintessence of the English liturgy in the best possible form." *

In addition to this service-book Wesley furnishes articles of religion, striking out from the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England the third, eighth, thirteenth, fifteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, twentieth, twenty-first, twenty-third, twenty-sixth, twenty-ninth, thirty-third, thirty-fourth, thirty-sixth, and thirty-seventh, omitting the apocryphal books from the sixth, the latter part of the ninth, and the latter part of the nineteenth, and making verbal emendations in some of the others.

The object of this was, first, brevity and simplicity; secondly, to avoid that which was alleged to be Calvinistic; and, thirdly, to give greater comprehension and liberality to the Creed.

It will be observed that Whatcoat and Vasey were ordained at Bristol on the 1st of September, 1784; the preface to the liturgy was dated eight days after, namely, September 9, and Wesley's official letter to

* Stevens's *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. ii, footnote, pp. 198, 199.

the American Methodists was dated the following day, September 10, 1784 ; and liturgy and letter were prepared and the ordination took place in Bristol, to which Wesley was going when, nearly forty years before, he was convinced that presbyters and bishops were the same order, and that presbyters had the same right to ordain. On the 18th of the same month Dr. Coke, accompanied by Whatcoat and Vasey, sailed from Bristol, carrying with them the articles of religion, the liturgy, and the ritual which Wesley had prepared for the American Methodists.

Wesley considered that they were “ now totally disentangled both from the state and the English hierarchy,” and were “ at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive Church ; ” * and hence, while he furnishes them with articles of religion and a liturgy, and ordained ministers to administer the sacraments, he also appointed superintendents to oversee the work and preside over the preachers and people ; and these superintendents, like those who occupied the episcopate in the primitive Christian Church, were to be presbyters in order, and presiding presbyters in office.

* Wesley's Letter to the Methodists in North America.

CHAPTER V

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL
CHURCH.

THE destitution of the people of America in regard to the sacraments created a demand for ordained ministers. So the disturbed ecclesiastical conditions created a demand for Church organization.

All the denominations had been affected more or less injuriously by the Revolutionary War. Even the Presbyterians, who had quite unanimously arrayed themselves on the side of the patriots, suffered greatly, and it was not until 1785 that steps were taken for revising the standards and organizing a General Assembly, and it was not until May, 1788, that a synod convened and resolved itself into a General Assembly. This General Assembly held its first meeting in 1789, and embraced the four synods of New York and New Jersey, Philadelphia, Virginia, and the Carolinas. In 1817 the Baptists formed a triennial convention, but that has since been discontinued.

Our study of the ecclesiastical conditions will turn our attention chiefly to the body with which Methodism was most closely identified.

The war had been disastrous to the Church of England in America. As we have seen, most of the

churches were vacant, and little need be added to the descriptions of distress already presented.

The author of the *Memoir of Bishop Hobart* speaks of it as a “desolated” Church; and says that “the consequences of the Revolution were for a time fatal;” that it had “neither point of union nor power of increase;” that “the few churches that remained had no tie of brotherhood among themselves;” that, “the external bond being removed, they fell apart like a rope of sand,” so that “each stood in its own state of helpless independency, fast tending—to use the expressive language of Burke—toward the dust and powder of individuality.’” *

In fact, the Church of England no longer existed in the United States. There were isolated churches, but, as we have already seen, there were few clergymen, and these scattered remains were without organization. There was no convocation or convention for the country, and there was no bishop, and, consequently, no episcopal confirmation.

What remained of the Established Church was unpopular, because it was “identified by popular prejudice with the royal government.” †

In the North the clergy were sustained by “foreign funds.” They were missionaries employed by the English Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, without whose stipends they could not have been sustained. The only clergy who were

* *Memoir of Bishop Hobart*, pp. 78, 80.

† *Ibid.*, p. 78.

not so supported in the North were those resident in Boston, Newport, New York city, and Philadelphia.*

A letter written in 1783 to one of the English archbishops shows the effects of the Revolutionary War upon the Northern clergy. It says:

“It may be proper to inform your grace that the late confusions have been fatal to great numbers of the American clergy. Many have died; others have been banished; so that several parishes are now destitute of incumbents. In the four colonies of Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania we know at this time of no less than *seventy* vacant churches. We believe the case of the other colonies to be nearly similar.”† The Episcopal clergy were, as Bishop White wrote, “gradually approaching to annihilation.”‡

The question with some who remained was “how to devise a plan for effecting its revival and organization.”§ How to give unity where there was “neither point of union nor power of increase,” and to give cohesion to that which had fallen “apart like a rope of sand” was certainly a knotty problem. Any effort to restore the “desolated” ecclesiasticism looked like a doubtful, if not an impossible, task.

“Great difficulties existed in the way of a success-

* Bishop White's *Memoirs of the Protestant Episcopal Church*. Second Ed., p. 3.

† Beardsley's *Life of Bishop Seabury*, pp. 92, 93.

‡ *Memoir of Bishop White*, p. 81.

§ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

ful prosecution of this object, arising from the condition of the country ; from strong prejudices generally prevailing against that church, partly from her former connection with the Established Church of England, and partly from opposition to her principles of ecclesiastical government ; and from the want of union in opinions and feelings among Episcopalians themselves, in the different States.” *

Dr. Wilson, author of the *Life of Bishop White*, says there was “an apprehension that if bishops were consecrated by that Church (the Church of England) for her, a subjection to them, or at least an undue influence, would be the result ; and an opinion, unreasonably formed, that episcopacy itself was unfriendly to the political principles of our republican governments. To which may be added the fact that many of her clergy had been led by conscientious scruples to adhere to the British government and leave the country ; while others, under the influence of the same scruples, though they remained here and quietly submitted to the established government, disapproved of the Revolution. The prejudices occasioned by these circumstances did not affect only those unconnected with the Episcopal Church, but existed also, in a measure, among her own members. So strong were they in South Carolina that the consent of the Episcopalians of that State to a general union was in danger of being lost

* *Memoir of Bishop White*, pp. 79, 80.

by their apprehensions of the consequences of the introduction of bishops consecrated by those of a foreign country. In others of the Southern States very lax notions on the subject of episcopacy were adopted, insomuch that it was thought there was no necessity to resort to foreign bishops to obtain the succession, but we might appoint and ordain them ourselves. The Church had suffered, too, in general estimation by the bad conduct of many of her clergy in Maryland and Virginia, and the States south of them. Whether this was the consequence of neglect and want of due care in those charged, in England, with the power of sending out clergymen to this country, or deception in the recommendation of unsuitable candidates to them, or of the want of discipline in the Church here, leaving the clergy free from any superintending control, and making it almost impracticable to remove or check a vicious clergyman, or of both those causes, the effects produced severely injured her influence and reputation, lowering her religious character in the opinion of the community, and inducing many of her own members to depart from her fold and unite themselves with *other churches*. From the operation of these causes the Episcopal Church, at the close of the Revolution, was reduced to a very low condition, and almost *in danger of extinction*, most of her clergy having died, or removed from the country, or retired from active duty, and none ordained to supply their place, and

her congregations in most places broken up and dispersed. The degree of this evil may be estimated by the fact, formerly mentioned, that in Pennsylvania Dr. White was, for some time, the only clergyman; and in the other States, even those in which the clergy had before been the most numerous, very few remained. In addition to all these embarrassments it was known that differences of opinion, on some important points, existed in the Church itself, particularly between the clergy of the Eastern States and those of the South, which might lead to disunion. And the want of bishops and the very inadequate supply of clergy prevented any vigorous and systematic exertion for her improvement.” *

The mere suggestion of introducing a bishop into the country, or even the episcopal office under some other name, called forth violent opposition among the people generally, and also among the Episcopalians themselves. So Bishop White speaks of “the prejudices of even some of the members of our own Church against the name, and much more against the office, of bishop.” †

Again he says : “ He remembers the ante-revolutionary times, when the presses profusely emitted pamphlets and newspaper disquisitions on the question whether an American bishop were to be endured,

* *Memoir of Bishop White*, pp. 93-95.

† Bishop White's *Memoirs of the Protestant Episcopal Church*. Second Edition, 1836, p. 88.

and when threats were thrown out of throwing such a person, if he were sent among us, into the river, although his agency was advocated for the sole purpose of a communion submitting itself to his spiritual jurisdiction. It is true that the subject was entangled with the affirmed danger of subserviency to the designs of the government of the mother country, in her hostility to the rights of her colonies. Such was the effect of the combining of these two opposite interests, and so specious were the pretensions of the anti-Episcopalian opposition to the measure, that it would have been impossible to have obtained a respectably signed lay petition for it, to our superiors in England, although to relieve us from the hardship of sending candidates for the ministry to that country to be ordained. When, after the Revolution, it was hoped the door would be open for the accomplishment of the object, even among those who were zealous for the obtaining of it there arose the question whether, in deference to prejudice, *there should not be dropped the name of bishop*, and the succession be continued under another name.” *

Such was the condition of things shortly after the close of the war for independence. The people who were not members were prejudiced against the remains of the Church of England, which had been largely representative of the British government.

* Bishop White's *Memoirs of the Protestant Episcopal Church*. Second Edition, p. 266.

The people who had been members were uncertain as to the future, and many of them were leaving and uniting themselves "with other churches," while the few clergymen who continued in charge of churches were disunited and were unable to devise a bond of union. These important differences of opinion, with the other difficulties which have been noted, reduced the Episcopal churches to such an extremely low condition that they were, as Bishop White's biographer says, "almost in danger of extinction."

The condition of the Methodists even in that day was one of marked contrast. They came out of the confusion of the war with solid columns which were well officered and successfully guided. Their preachers were identified with the people, and prejudice did not exist against the Methodists as a foreign organization or the representative of a foreign state, with which there had been a war, as it did against the fragments of the English national Church. As a result of this, as well as of earnest work, both ministers and members among the Methodists were steadily increasing.

Doubtful, indeed, must have seemed the future of the Episcopal churches, but here and there suggestions began to be made in hope of bringing about some solution of the problem.

Early in August, 1782, Dr. White, of Philadelphia, who for some time had been the only clergyman in Pennsylvania, published a small pamphlet, entitled

The Case of the Episcopal Churches considered," in which, in view of the difficulties, he proposed a plan of organization. His biographer tells us that "The particular organization then proposed comprehended permanent superintending ministers, with power similar to those of bishops ; and the provisions suggested were, that the individual churches should be associated in small districts, in each of which there should be a convention composed of representatives elected from the vestry or congregation of the several churches within it, the minister being one ; that they should choose a permanent president, who, with other clergymen appointed by the body, might exercise powers purely spiritual ; in particular, those of ordination and discipline over the clergy, according to reasonable laws ;" and as "the churches were unable to provide a support," "the duties assigned to" the "superintending ministers" "ought not materially to interfere with their employments as parochial clergymen, and their superintendence should consequently be confined to small districts." *

How familiar these words "superintending ministers" and "superintendence" seem to those who recollect that Wesley appointed Dr. Coke to be a "superintendent!" The necessity of the times appears to have impressed White and Wesley in the same way. It will also be noticed, in passing, that in 1779, more than three years before the publication of Dr. White's

* *Memoir of Bishop White*, p. 83.

pamphlet, the Methodists in America had appealed their case to Mr. Wesley.

Dr. White's recommendation was "to include in the proposed frame of government a general approbation of episcopacy, and a declaration of an intention to procure the succession as soon as conveniently may be, but in the meantime to carry the plan into effect without waiting for the succession;"* and when "the episcopal succession" was "afterward obtained, any supposed imperfections of the intermediate ordinations might, *if it were judged proper*, be supplied, *without acknowledging their nullity*, by a conditional ordination, resembling that of conditional baptism in the liturgy," which "was an expedient proposed by Archbishop Tillotson, Bishops Patrick, Stillingfleet, and others, at the revolution, and had been actually practiced in Ireland by Archbishop Bramhall."†

Bishop White's biographer observes: "He maintained the propriety of not waiting for the episcopal succession, on the ground that the worship of God and the instruction and reformation of the people are the principal objects of ecclesiastical discipline; and these paramount objects should not be relinquished or suspended by scrupulous adherence to episcopacy, when there was an inability to procure it; and that all the obligations of conformity to the divine ordinances, all the arguments which prove the connection

* Pamph., p. 17.

† *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 20.

between public worship and the morals of a people, combined to urge the adopting of some speedy measure to provide for the public ministry in these Churches. He went, at large, into the proofs, from the institutions of the Church of England, and from the opinions and reasonings of many of her most eminent divines, that such a temporary departure from episcopacy, in a case of necessity, was not opposed to her principles." *

Bishop White introduced similar doctrines into his episcopal charges of 1807 and 1834, and, in a note added on the 21st of December, 1830, to a letter to Bishop Hobart, said :

"In agreement with the sentiments expressed in that pamphlet, I am still of opinion that in an exigency in which a duly authorized ministry cannot be obtained the paramount duty of preaching the Gospel, and the worshiping of God on the terms of the Christian covenant, should go on, in the best manner which circumstances permit. In regard to the episcopacy, I think it should be sustained, as the government of the Church from the time of the apostles, but without crimiⁿinating the ministry of other churches, as is the course taken by the Church of England." † The pamphlet had been placed in the hands of the Archbishop of York, and was officially presented by Mr. Adams, the American minister, to the Archbishop of Canterbury, but neither

* *Memoir of Bishop White*, p. 85.

† *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 87.

prelate expressed any dissatisfaction with the pamphlet.*

Leaving out the question of succession, Wesley himself could hardly have written a better defense of his course than these words of Dr. White. In "an exigency," he said, "the paramount duty of preaching the Gospel, and the worshiping of God on the terms of the Christian covenant, should go on, in the best manner which circumstances permit." So said Wesley, and he ordained ministers. So said the American Methodist ministers, and they preached and administered the sacraments.

Dr. White held that it was right to have a "superintending minister," and Wesley appointed a "superintendent." Dr. White acknowledged the validity of the ordination given by presbyters, and so Wesley held the right of presbyters to ordain, and his presbytery, formed of regularly ordained presbyters who were Methodists, did ordain other presbyters. It is true that Dr. White suggested that "any *supposed* imperfections" might be supplied in the future "*if it were judged proper*;" but he insisted that, even if this were done, it should be "*without acknowledging their nullity*." He is not sure that it would be proper to attempt to correct "any *supposed* imperfections of the intermediate ordinations," but he is positive that there is no invalidity about such presbyterial ordinations, and, so, on the theory of necessity

* *Memoir of Bishop White*, p. 87.

as held by Bishop White, the ordinations by Wesley were to be acknowledged as valid.

Dr. White's liberal views, however, were not to stand unopposed. The next year antagonism displayed itself in the North and emanated from the clergy of Connecticut.

On the 25th of March, 1783, a small body of Episcopal ministers, assembled at Woodbury in that State, addressed a letter to Dr. White taking grave exceptions to his views. In it they said: "But why do you include a general approbation of episcopacy in your proposed new frame of government? Not because you think bishops a constituent part of an Episcopal Church, unless you conceive they derive their office and existence from the king's authority; for though you acknowledge we cannot at present have bishops here, and *propose to set up without them*, yet you say no constitutional principle of our Church is changed by the Revolution, but what was founded on the authority of the king. Your motives for the above general approbation seem, indeed, to be purely political. But could you have proposed to set up the ministry without waiting for the succession, had you believed the episcopal superiority to be an ordinance of Christ, with the exclusive authority of ordination and government, and that it has ever been so esteemed in the purest ages of the Church? And yet we conceive this to be the sense of Episcopalians in general, and warranted by the constant

practice of the Christian Church. Really, sir, we think an Episcopal Church without episcopacy, if it be not a contradiction in terms, would, however, be a new thing under the sun; and yet the Episcopal Church, by the pamphlet proposed to be erected, must be in this predicament till the succession be obtained. You plead necessity, however, and argue that the best writers in the Church admit of presbyterian ordination where episcopal cannot be had. To prove this you quote concessions from the venerable Hooker and Dr. Chandler, which their exuberant charity for the Reformed Churches abroad led them to make. Should we consent to a temporary departure from episcopacy there would be very little propriety in asking for it afterwards, and as little reason ever to expect it in America.*

Quite logical, indeed, is this letter. It was very doubtful if Dr. White's plan was carried out whether the Americans would ever trouble themselves about any foreign consecration. The writers of the letter drew a very correct inference when they inferred that Dr. White did not believe "the episcopal superiority to be an ordinance of Christ with the exclusive authority of ordination and government," for he believed with the best writers of the Church of England that there were circumstances when presbyterian ordination was just as valid as that given by the Church of England bishops.

* Letter in *Life of Bishop Seabury*, pp. 98-102.

But Dr. White was not alone in these liberal views. All through the southern section of the country such opinions seem to have prevailed. The Episcopalians in South Carolina proposed adopting a nominal episcopacy, and "the legislature of Maryland entertained the plan of themselves appointing the ordainers." *

All these expedients were really unintended indorsements of the presbyterial ordination of Methodism. If their suggestions were right, the action of Wesley and his followers was right. Their ordination would have been by presbyters, and the Methodist ordination was by presbyters. They claimed that their suggestions were in harmony with the "best writers" of the Anglican Church, and, if so, then the course of Methodism was equally in harmony with the principles enunciated by the same "best writers." Dr. White was much nearer the true view than the little company of Connecticut clergymen; and if his views had prevailed there would have been introduced an episcopate which would have borne a striking resemblance to that of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The reference to the letter sent to Dr. White by the Connecticut clergymen recalls an important historic event which took place in their meeting on the 25th of March, 1783, the very day the letter was written. That event was nothing less than the selection, by this convention, of a clergyman who should go to

* *Memoir of Bishop Hobart*, p. 80.

England and endeavor to secure from the English prelates consecration as a bishop. Yet, in that letter, they did not inform Dr. White of the steps they were taking, and Dr. White did not know any thing about the project. Evidently they did not intend he should know any thing in regard to it, though the purpose of the gathering was to take the preliminary steps toward obtaining a bishop.

They numbered ten, and met in secret conclave. "No laymen were admitted to the gathering, and it was so secret as to be known only to the clergy." "No minutes were kept to be made public." "The fear of opposition, and perhaps the fear of not having the hearty concurrence of their lay brethren, led to the secrecy of the movement." The effort to keep the matter secret may be inferred from the fact that Daniel Fogg, who was one of the ten, wrote, on the 2d of July of that year, to the Rev. Mr. Parker, of Boston, as follows: "The Connecticut clergy have done already every thing in their power in the matter you were anxious about; would write you the particulars, if I knew of any safe opportunity of sending this letter, but as I do not, must defer it till I do." *

Secrecy must have seemed of vital importance when, even months after this secret gathering, one of the ten would not state the facts in a letter to a clergyman who appears to have been equally desirous of

* Beardsley's *Life of Bishop Seabury*, Third Edition, p. 78.

securing a bishop, lest the information might be imparted to others.

This secret meeting, kept secret even from the members of the churches in Connecticut, convened, not in a church, but in a private house in the village of Woodbury, in that State, and this house was that of the rector of the church, who was a missionary of the British Society.* In this secret meeting in this private house, this convention of ten ministers, “on the 25th day of March, without formal election, selected two persons, the Rev. Jeremiah Leaming and the Rev. Samuel Seabury, as suitable, either of them, to go to England and obtain, if possible, episcopal consecration.” †

“The two candidates were in New York, and Mr. Leaming, to whom the appointment was first offered, shrank, at his time of life and with his infirmities, from undertaking responsibilities and burdens so great. There was good reason for giving him the opportunity to decline the high and sacred office.” ‡ Probably there was an expectation that he would decline, and consequently the real choice of the ten clergymen was Dr. Seabury.

Seabury was in New York at this time, and was there with very good reasons—for his own personal safety. Both he and Leaming were tories. Leaming was a refugee from his Connecticut parish, and Sea-

* Beardsley's *Life of Bishop Seabury*, Third Edition, p. 77.

† *Ibid.*, p. 78.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

bury from his parish at Westchester on Long Island Sound, and they and others were under the protection of the British forces which occupied New York city. Here Dr. Seabury practiced medicine, and held the position of chaplain in one of the British regiments. Seabury was born while his father was a Congregational minister, and he was baptized by a minister of the Congregational Church. Subsequently his father entered the ministry of the Church of England, and received an appointment as missionary to New London, and in course of time the son became a minister in the same Church. When the war for independence broke out Dr. Seabury was opposed to the intentions and efforts of the Continental Congress, and as a result he found it more comfortable within the British lines. The British had not evacuated New York when he received the notification that at the secret meeting of ten he had been selected to go to England for consecration. When he sailed it was in the flag-ship of the English Admiral Digby.

He carried with him various documents from the ten Connecticut ministers and three ministers who were in New York city. In the letter from the Connecticut clergymen to the Archbishop of York one of the arguments presented for the purpose of securing the consecration was the desire to prevent the consummation of Dr. White's plan. The petition urges dispatch, "because if it be now any longer neglected there is reason to apprehend that a plan of a

very extraordinary nature, lately formed and published in Philadelphia, may be carried into execution. This plan is, in brief, to constitute a nominal episcopate by the united suffrages of presbyters and laymen. The peculiar situation of the Episcopal Churches in America, and the necessity of adopting some speedy remedy for the want of a regular episcopate, are offered, in the publication here alluded to, as reasons fully sufficient to justify the scheme. We think it our duty to reject such a spurious substitute for episcopacy, and, as far as may be in our power, to prevent its taking effect." *

They were determined to prevent the success of Dr. White's plan, and so they kept their movements from him, but they could use his proposal to influence the Archbishop of York in their favor, and in a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury they made it the basis of a similar argument.

In this letter they say : " A further reason, we beg leave to observe, that induces us to take this early and only measure we can devise for this purpose is effectually to prevent the carrying into execution a plan of a very extraordinary nature lately come to our knowledge, formed and published in Philadelphia, and, as we suppose, circulating in the Southern States with a design to have it adopted. The plan is, in brief, to constitute a nominal ideal episcopate, by the united suffrages of presbyters and laymen. The sin-

* Beardsley's *Life of Bishop Seabury*, pp. 80, 81.

gular and peculiar situation of the American Church, the exigence of the case, and the necessity of adopting some speedy and specious remedy corresponding with the state of affairs in the country, are some of the pleas which are adduced as adequate to give full sanction to this scheme. To what degree such a plan may operate upon the minds of the uninformed, unstable, or unprincipled part of the Church we can at present form no opinion; equally unable are we to conjecture what may be the lengths to which the rage for popular right, as the fountain for all institutions, civil and ecclesiastical, will run; sufficient for us it is that, while we conscientiously reject such a spurious substitute for episcopacy, we also think it our duty to take every step within our power to frustrate its pernicious effects." * And so they kept their effort secret from Dr. White, and the other Episcopalians who favored his simpler and more liberal views.

The Rev. Mr. Fogg, who before had written the Rev. Samuel Parker, of Boston, wrote, on the 14th of July, 1783, another letter to the same reverend gentleman, in which he says more about secrecy, and at the same time reveals some of their intentions, which may now be done with less danger, for prior to this Dr. Seabury had landed in England. Mr. Fogg says: "I wrote you a few lines the 2d instant by an uncertain conveyance, in which I mentioned that the Connecticut clergy had done all in their power re-

* Beardsley's *Life of Bishop Seabury*, p. 87.

specting the matter you were anxious about ; but they keep it a profound secret even from their most intimate friends of the laity." He then tells of the selection of Dr. Seabury, and adds : " If he succeeds, he is to come out as a missionary for New London or some other vacant mission, and *if they will not receive him in Connecticut, or in any other of the States of America, he is to go to Nova Scotia.* Sir Guy [Carleton, the British commander-in-chief] highly approves of the plan, and has used all his influence in favor of it." *

So it appears that they had anticipated the possibility of a refusal to receive Dr. Seabury in any of the States even if he was made bishop, and so, with his British proclivities, he was to reside in Nova Scotia, whither American candidates might go for ordination.

On the 1st of August, 1783, Mr. Fogg again writes Mr. Parker, as follows :

" I am very glad that the conduct of the Connecticut clergy meets with your approbation in the main. Dr. Seabury's being a refugee was an objection which I made, but was answered, they could not fix upon any other person who they thought was so likely to succeed as he was, and should he succeed, and not be permitted to reside in any of the United States it would be an easy matter for any other person who was not obnoxious to the *powers that be* to be con-

* Beardsley's *Life of Bishop Seabury*, pp. 103, 104.

secrated by him at Halifax. And as to the objection of not consulting the clergy of the other States, the time would not allow of it, and there was nobody to consult in the State of New York, for there is not one clergyman there except refugees, and they were consulted. And in the State of Connecticut there are fourteen clergymen. And in your State and New Hampshire you know how many there are, and you know there is no compulsion in the matter, and you will be left to act as you please, either to be subject to him or not." * It would appear from this that Mr. Parker had two objections to Dr. Seabury; first, that he was not a patriot, but a tory refugee, and, secondly, that the clergy generally had not been consulted in his selection. The answer is, first, that they thought he was more likely to succeed in securing the consecration from the English bishops, and, secondly, that there was not time to consult the clergy generally, though there was time to write to Dr. White a criticism on his plan, and there were no clergymen in New York "except refugees," and they had been consulted.

It was true that Dr. Seabury was "*obnoxious to the powers that be*," but if he was not "permitted to reside in any of the United States," he could reside on British territory near by. His toryism might commend him to the English bishops and give him a congenial home in Halifax, if he was not permitted to reside in the land which had just gained its inde-

* Beardsley's *Life of Bishop Seabury*, p. 105.

pendence. Dr. Seabury represented the tory element, while Dr. White represented the spirit of patriotism.

Dr. Seabury lost no time in seeking the English bishops and trying to induce them to grant him consecration, but still endeavoring to keep the matter from the knowledge of the American people. After he had seen the Bishop of London and the Archbishop of Canterbury, he wrote his first letter from England to his Connecticut clergy. In it he mentions having waited on the Bishop of London, who "approved of the scheme." As to the primate, however, he says: "But upon conversing with his grace of Canterbury I found his opinion rather different from the Bishop of London. He received me politely, approved of the measure, saw the necessity of it, and would do all he could to carry it into execution. *But he must proceed openly and with candor.*" Further on he says: "My greatest fear arises from the matter *becoming public*, as it now must, and that the Dissenters here will prevail on your government to apply against it: *this I think would effectually crush it*, at least so far as it relates to Connecticut. You will therefore do well to attend to this circumstance yourselves, and get such of your friends as you can trust, to find out, should any such intelligence come from hence." *

In August, after an interview with the Archbishop of York, which he fears was "to very little purpose,"

* Beardsley's *Life of Bishop Seabury*, pp. 106, 107.

he writes again to the ten clergymen in Connecticut and says: "The matter here will become public. It will soon get to Connecticut. Had you not, gentlemen, better make immediate application to the State for permission to have a bishop to reside there? Should you not succeed, you lose nothing, and I am pretty confident you will not succeed here without such consent." * The matter could not be kept secret much longer, for both the archbishops refused to consecrate the candidate without the consent of the State of Connecticut, and now that it was necessary to appeal to the Assembly of the State he expresses his willingness to give up his "pretensions to any person who shall be agreeable" to the Connecticut clergy, "and less exceptionable to the State."

Members of the Assembly were seen, but no formal action was taken by that body. What had been done was communicated to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and on May 3, 1784, Dr. Seabury wrote that he had called on the primate on the first of that month, and then gives the following account of this interview: "His grace's behavior, though polite, I thought was cool and restrained. When he had read the letter he observed that it was still the application only of the clergy, and that the permission was only the permission of individuals, and not of the legislature." †

In the meantime Dr. White, who was in total

* Beardsley's *Life of Bishop Seabury*, p. 109.

† *Ibid.*, p. 120.

ignorance as to the Connecticut movement, had not abandoned his idea of establishing an Episcopal Church in the United States. The idea began to take form in a meeting convened for an entirely different purpose. Dr. White says: "The first step toward the forming of a collective body of the Episcopal Church in the United States was taken at a meeting, for another purpose, of a few clergymen of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, at Brunswick, in New Jersey, on the 13th and 14th of May, 1784. These clergymen, in consequence of prior correspondence, had met for the purpose of consulting in what way to renew a society that had existed under charters of incorporation from the governors of the said three States, for the support of widows and children of deceased clergymen. Here it was determined to procure a larger meeting on the fifth of the ensuing October, in New York, not only for the purpose of reviving the said charitable institution, but to confer and agree on some general principles of a union of the Episcopal Church throughout the States." *

Nine clergymen were present, and four laymen who happened to be in the town "were requested to attend. . The first day was chiefly taken up with discussing principles of ecclesiastical union. The next morning," says Bishop White, "the author was

* Bishop White's *Memoirs of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Second Edition, pp. 21, 22.

taken aside, before the meeting, by Mr. Benjamin Moore, who expressed the wish of himself and others that nothing should be urged further on the subject, as they found themselves peculiarly circumstanced, in consequence of their having joined the clergy of Connecticut in their application for the consecration of a bishop. This brought to the knowledge of the clergy from Philadelphia, what they had not known, that Dr. Samuel Seabury, of the State of New York, who had sailed for England just before the evacuation of New York by the British troops, carried with him a petition to the English bishops for his consecration.

“In consequence of the measure taken as above stated, the gentlemen concerned in it thought that during the pending of their application they could not consistently join in any proceedings which might be construed to interfere with it. Accordingly, the convention of that day, on which the meeting ended, was principally confined to the business of the revival of the corporation for the relief of the widows and the children of the clergy. But before the clergy parted it was agreed to procure as general a meeting as might be of representatives of the clergy and of the laity of the different States, in the city of New York, on the 6th of October following.

The author remarked at this meeting that, notwithstanding the good humor which prevailed at it, the more Northern clergymen were under apprehensions of there being a disposition on the part of the

more Southern to make material deviation from the ecclesiastical system of England in the article of Church government. At the same time he wondered that any sensible and well-informed persons should overlook the propriety of accommodating that system, in some respects, to the prevailing sentiments and habits of the people of this country, now become an independent and combined commonwealth." *

So these nine ministers and four accidental laymen really did nothing in regard to the ecclesiastical union further than converse about it. What they might have done had not the Seabury secret been revealed no one can tell. The surprise of that revelation compelled a halt. Dr. White did not think the action of the Connecticut ministers legal. He says: "This was an act of the clergy generally in that State, and of a few in New York; and is rather to be considered as done by them in their individual capacities than as a regular ecclesiastical proceeding; because, as yet, there had not been any organized assembly who could claim the power of acting for the Church in consequence of either the express or the implied consent of the body of Episcopalians." †

In the meantime Dr. Seabury had tried in vain to secure consecration from the English bishops. One legal difficulty after another was put in his way, and one of the strongest objections was the fact that he had

* Bishop White's *Memoirs of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Second Edition, pp. 78, 79.

† *Ibid.*, p. 83.

not been the choice of a properly organized Church. So Bishop Hobart's biographer says that "the Archbishop of Canterbury declined consecrating Dr. Seabury on this ground, among others, that he was not the choice of the Church at large." *

The proposed meeting of Episcopalians was held in October, 1784, in the city of New York. Sixteen ministers and eleven laymen were present. These were one minister from Massachusetts, one from Connecticut, six from New York, one from New Jersey, three from Pennsylvania, two from Delaware, one from Maryland, and one from Virginia. Small as it was it had no authorization from the Church at large. This, however, was impossible, for as yet there was no organized Church for these persons to represent.

Bishop White says: "The present meeting, like that in May, is here spoken of as a voluntary one, and not an authorized convention, because there were no authorities from the churches in the several States, even in the appointment of the members, which were made from the congregations to which they respectively belonged; except of Mr. Parker, from Massachusetts, of Mr. Marshall from Connecticut, and of those who attended from Pennsylvania, even from these States, there was no further authority than to deliberate and propose." † "Not being possessed of

* *Life of Bishop Hobart*, p. 85.

† Bishop White's *Memoirs of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Second Edition, p. 80.

sufficient authority to establish definitely any principles of government, they only recommended the course to be pursued." *

This informal and non-representative meeting agreed upon certain principles to be presented to those of like ecclesiastical faith, and proposed a general convention to meet in 1785. All those present, nevertheless, were not bound by these recommendations, for they were nothing more than recommendatory measures. So Bishop White says: "It is proper to remark that although a clergyman appeared at this meeting on the part of the Church in Connecticut, it is not to be thought that there was an obligation on any in that State to support the above principles; because Mr. Marshall read to the assembly a paper which expressed his being only empowered to announce that the clergy of Connecticut had taken measures for the obtaining of an episcopate." The bishop also records that "some were startled at the very circumstance of taking the stand of an independent Church." †

Up to this time the fragments of the Church of England in America had not been re-organized, and with the existing conditions no one could, at that time, tell whether they ever would secure an organization.

In the meantime Dr. Seabury was prosecuting his

* Wilson's *Memoir of Bishop White*, p. 101.

† Bishop White's *Memoirs of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Second Edition, p. 81.

cause with all diligence. He had received a copy of "the act of the legislature of Connecticut, respecting liberty of conscience in that State," which he thinks, "if it be fairly interpreted," should cover his case. He apprehends, however, "some difficulties that may not easily be got over." These are legal restrictions on the king of England and the bishops of the national Church. But he says: "I have declared my opinion, which is, as there is no law existing relative to a bishop who is to reside in a foreign State, the archbishops are left to the general laws of the Christian Church, and have no need either of the king's leave or dispensation." *

This was precisely Wesley's position. He contended that the laws of the State Church no longer held as to the new American nation, and, consequently, he was "left to the general laws of the Christian Church," as taught in the New Testament, and the practice of the primitive Christian Church, and, so, without "the king's leave or dispensation," he ordained ministers for the Methodists in America and sent them an episcopate.

Dr. Seabury's friends began to look in other directions for the coveted consecration. "Overtures were made for him without his knowledge to Cartwright of Shrewsbury, an irregular non-juror of the Separatist party in England, who with Price was consecrated uncanonically in 1780 by a single bishop, just as

* Beardsley's *Life of Bishop Seabury*, p. 130.

Robert Welton was consecrated by Ralph Taylor, and John Talbot by Taylor and Welton; these men, Welton and Talbot, never being recognized as bishops, however, by the rest of the body, yet both coming to America and exercising secretly episcopal functions." *

So Dr. Seabury's friends would have been willing, under the circumstances, to have him receive irreg-

* Beardsley's *Life of Bishop Seabury*, p. 134. "Dr. Welton and Mr. Talbot—the oldest missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel—solicited and received consecration from the non-juring bishops. Dr. Welton was consecrated by Dr. Ralph Taylor in 1722; Mr. Talbot shortly afterward by Drs. Taylor and Welton. Political disqualification made them unable to perform publicly any episcopal acts; but there is reason to believe that they privately administered the rite of confirmation, and in some cases, at least, ordained clergy" (*History of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America*, by the Bishop of Oxford, p. 160). "The Rev. John Talbot," says Dr. Beardsley, "the associate of Mr. Keith in his missionary travels, and afterward stationed at Burlington, N. J., visited England in 1720. While there he, with Rev. Dr. Welton, was consecrated to the episcopal office by the non-juring bishops, and returned to Burlington. Welton came to Philadelphia, and officiated for a time in Christ Church in that city. 'Such a step,' says Hawkins, 'admits of no justification, but we may well suppose that he (Talbot) was led to take it by no personal ambition, but by that strong and earnest conviction of the absolute necessity of an episcopate for the welfare of the Church in America of which his letters form such abundant testimony. It appears that he occasionally assumed the episcopal dress, and that he administered the ordinance of confirmation. Whatever confusion or schism might have arisen by the irregular exercise of the episcopal office was prevented by an order from the Privy Council for Welton's return to England, and the death of Mr. Talbot, which occurred in 1727.'" (*History of Episcopal Church in Connecticut*, vol. i, p. 252, note).

ular consecration from one that the Church of England did not recognize as a bishop. It would appear also that Dr. Seabury himself would at that time have accepted such consecration, irregular and illegitimate though it undoubtedly was esteemed by many. Dr. Beardsley, his biographer, says: "Providentially the application to Cartwright was unnecessary."

Dr. Seabury wrote to Cartwright as follows: "Some time ago a letter from you to Rev. Dr. Chandler, respecting some queries proposed by the Rev. Mr. Boucher, was put into my hands. This was the first information I had received concerning yourself or Bishop Price. And as I am in spiritual matters totally independent of any civil power, and have no manner of objection, but a sincere inclination to conform myself, as near as possible, to the primitive Catholic Church in doctrine and discipline, that letter would have been immediately attended to by me, had I not primarily entered into a negotiation with the bishops in the North to obtain through them a free, valid, and purely ecclesiastical episcopacy for the Church in Connecticut. Till within a few days I have had no decided answer from the North, and therefore did not sooner write to you because I could make no certain reply to your letter. But as the issue of the negotiation I was engaged in is such that I cannot in honor retreat, I can only at present return you my hearty and unfeigned thanks

for the candid communication and liberal sentiments which your letter contained, and to assure you that I shall ever retain the highest esteem and veneration both for yourself and Bishop Price, on account of the ready disposition which you both show to impart the great blessing of a primitive episcopacy to the destitute Church in America. Should any circumstances render it convenient to open a further correspondence on this or any other subject in which the interest of Christ's Church may be concerned, I flatter myself with a continuance of that spirit of liberality and Christian condescension which your letter manifested, and shall make it my study to return it in the most open and unreserved manner.

“Be pleased to present my best respects to Bishop Price, and to accept the tender of unfeigned regard and esteem from, Right Rev. Sir, your most obedient and very humble servant.” *

Truly, “circumstances alter cases.” Dr. Seabury had determined to obtain consecration from the Church of England bishops if it were possible. If he had succeeded it is not clear that he would have regarded such men as Cartwright and Price as bishops at all; but now that he cannot secure consecration from the bishops of the State Church his views become exceedingly liberal, and these men who were not only non-jurors, but irregular non-jurors at that, who, according to the notions of High-Churchmen,

* Beardsley's *Life of Bishop Seabury*, p. 135.

had been uncanonically consecrated, he addresses as Right Rev. Bishops.

He also remarks that he had "a sincere inclination to conform," "as near as possible, to the primitive catholic Church in doctrine and discipline." Before he was most anxious to conform to the Church of England. Wesley also was anxious to conform to the practice of the primitive Christian Church, and so, under the circumstances, he resorted to presbyterial ordination. Seabury would have "immediately attended" to Bishop Cartwright's letter, had he not "entered into a negotiation" with the non-juring bishops in Scotland, but now, in view of possible failure in that direction, he takes the precaution to thank Bishops Cartwright and Price for "the ready disposition" they showed "to impart the great blessing of a primitive episcopacy," and, "should any circumstances render it convenient to open a further correspondence," he would avail himself of their "spirit of liberality and Christian condescension."

This means that if he does not succeed in Scotland he will come to them, and his spirit of liberality and love of a "primitive episcopacy" was growing so rapidly that if he failed with them he might be willing to accept the presbyterial plan of Dr. White. He might even submit to such an arrangement as that which Wesley decided upon, for a High-Churchman would have to admit that Wesley's presbyterial ordination was quite as regular as a consecration by

an uncanonically consecrated, irregular, non-juring English bishop who was not recognized by the law.

Shortly after writing this letter, Seabury started from London for Scotland to secure consecration from the Scotch non-juring bishops, but before doing so he wrote to Bishop Kilgour, one of the Scotch non-jurors, and again referred to "catholic and primitive principles."*

About a month before this the Rev. Richard Whatcoat and the Rev. Thomas Vasey, who had been ordained "on catholic and primitive principles," and the Rev. Thomas Coke, LL.D., who had been "set apart" as a superintendent "on catholic and primitive principles," had sailed for America, and they landed in New York on the 3rd of November, 1784, thus giving to the American Methodists the only thing they needed to perform the full functions of a Christian Church—namely, ordained ministers; and also giving them the first Protestant episcopate recognized by any religious body after the United States had won their independence.†

* *Life of Bishop Seabury*, p. 142.

† The General Association of Virginia Baptists, in 1776, by a unanimous vote, established episcopacy and elected three ministers to that office. The Rev. Samuel Harris was first elected, and all that part of Virginia lying south of the James River was declared to be his diocese. Later in the year, they elected the Rev. John Waller and Elijah Craig, who were to have charge of all the State lying north of the James River. "The General Association had assumed powers not exceeded by any previous body of clergy in any age, Catholic or Protestant. Not only had it created and sent forth three diocesan

On Dr. Seabury's arrival in Aberdeen he met with new and unexpected opposition. This was a letter written by the Rev. Dr. William Smith, a Scotchman by birth, formerly Provost of the College of Philadelphia. At that time he was at the head of Washington College in Maryland. Subsequently he was elected bishop for Maryland, but, on account of opposition to an episcopate, never was consecrated.*

In this letter Dr. Smith appealed to the Scotch non-juring bishops, if they valued their own peace and advantage as a Christian society, not to meddle with Seabury's consecration, and affirmed that it was "against the earnest, sound advice of the archbishops of Canterbury and York, to whom Dr. Seabury's design was communicated; they not thinking him a fit person, especially as he was actively and deeply engaged against Congress; that he would by this for-

bishops, under the name of 'apostles or messengers,' but it had taken them—unlike the English Baptists—from the jurisdiction of the individual churches of which they are members, to whose discipline they were no longer subject. Ordination of the ministers was removed from the churches and given to the bishops; it instructed the churches how to proceed in case they should commit offenses demanding their impeachment; and if in this lower court an indictment was sustained it provided for the organization of a high court, to be called 'A General Conference of the Churches,' which should 'have power to excommunicate or restore them' " (Howell's *Early Baptists of Virginia*, p. 110). A reaction quickly followed, and the bishops disappeared from office and "gladly resumed their places beside their brother presbyters " (Howell's *Early Baptists of Virginia*, p. 115).

* McClintock & Strong's Cyclopædia.

ward step render episcopacy suspected there, the people not having had time, after a total derangement of their civil affairs, to consider as yet of ecclesiastical; and if it were unexpectedly and rashly introduced among them at the instigation of a few clergy only that remained, without their being consulted, would occasion it to be entirely slighted, unless with the approbation of the State they belong to, which is what they are laboring after just now, having called several provincial meetings together this autumn, to settle some preliminary articles of a Protestant Episcopal Church, as near as may be to that of England or Scotland." *

Such was the situation when Dr. Coke landed in New York. Dr. Seabury had not secured consecration in England or in Scotland. It may be the American Methodists did not know any thing about Seabury's movements. They did know, however, that there was no Church of England in the United States. They did know that the English State Church had no dominion in their country. They also knew that the fragmentary remains of the former Church of England had not been reorganized. Whatever they may have thought before in regard to relations with the Church of England, the situation now was entirely changed. No new episcopal church had been organized, and, with the prejudices existing among the people generally, both inside and outside the churches,

* *Life of Bishop Seabury*, p. 143.

formerly associated with the English State Church, it was doubtful whether an acceptable Church would ever be organized with an episcopal government similar to that of the Church of England.

It is true that a gathering had been held in October, but it is not certain that the Methodists knew any thing about it, while it is certain that they were not consulted or asked to co-operate.

Under such circumstances, they were, by every natural right, free to act for themselves, no matter what had been their previous relations and preferences. Even if the ecclesiastical conditions had not been so disorganized they had the same right to look after their own interests and perfect their own organization.

The preface to the Prayer Book of the Protestant Episcopal Church, which was ratified on the 16th of October, 1789, contains a recognition of this right to organize and for each Church to choose its own polity, and it recognizes as true churches the religious bodies which so organize, notwithstanding their differences in ecclesiastical polity. It says :

“When in the course of divine Providence these American States became independent with respect to civil government, their ecclesiastical independence was necessarily included ; and the *different religious denominations* of Christians in these States were left at full and equal liberty to model and organize their *respective Churches* and forms of worship and dis-

cipline, in such manner as they might judge most convenient for their future prosperity, consistently with the Constitution and laws of their country.”

Sometimes the remark is made that the Methodists in America separated from the Church of England, but the fact is that with the independence of the United States there ceased to be any Church of England in the new nation, and, consequently, there was no Church of England to separate from. Neither did they separate from “The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America,” for it had not come into existence, and no one could tell whether it ever would have a being. It is true that the Methodists had had a close affiliation with the Church of England, but it is equally true that they varied in a marked manner from the State Church, though they cherished a warm regard for many things connected with it.

Notwithstanding this relationship prior to the independence of the United States, the American Methodists had a distinct ecclesiastical organization. They had their congregations and their rolls of members, their preachers and their distinct public services.

Gradually they were taking form and steadily growing up during the course of years, and, amid all the ecclesiastical confusion connected with the Revolutionary War, this was the one body that was not in confusion.

In 1773 the first American Methodist Annual Conference was held in the city of Philadelphia, and, notwithstanding the difficulties of the times, such a conference was held every year thereafter.

All along from 1773 American Methodism was a thoroughly organized body, with its congregations of worshipers, its regularly enrolled membership, its preachers in charge and their assistants, who gave the people pastoral oversight, its Annual Conference, where the preachers assembled in council for consultation in regard to the interests to which they had consecrated their lives, and to receive their several assignments, and to all was given unity of direction through Wesley's general assistant, who had the oversight of all.

When the day of ecclesiastical distress came in other bodies, it had none. It had distress on account of lack of the sacraments, but not on account of organization. All through these years it was a well-organized body. It did not separate from the Church of England, but when the Church of England in America fell to pieces it merely emerged from the ruins. When other ecclesiastical bodies were in confusion it stood forth with a compactness which was an emphatic contrast, and while the isolated remains of the Church of England were struggling to effect a re-formation of the fragments broken up by State lines and sectional differences, it was one organism, stretching far and wide

over the country, and about the only body that could be said to have a national organization.

What would be the outcome of the efforts of those who belonged to other communions no one could predict with any certainty, but it was evident that American Methodism had already sufficient organization to go on with the work of a Christian Church, and especially now, since it had received ordained ministers who were duly authorized to administer the sacraments among their congregations.

The first Methodist minister Dr. Coke met in America was John Dickins, who was stationed in New York. Dickins had been a student in Eton College, England, and years before this he had projected a seminary for Methodists in America. Coke promptly informed Dickins as to the work he came to perform, and his Journal, under date of the very day he landed, has this entry: "I have opened Mr. Wesley's plan to Brother Dickins, the traveling preacher stationed at this place (New York), and he highly approves of it; says that all the preachers most earnestly long for such a regulation and that Mr. Asbury, he is sure, will agree to it. He presses me earnestly to make it public, because, as he most justly argues, Mr. Wesley has determined the point, and therefore it is not to be investigated but complied with." * Coke, however, declined to disclose it any further until he had met and consulted with Francis

* Coke's Journal, Nov. 3, 1784.

Asbury, who for years had been performing the duties of general assistant to Wesley.

For this purpose Dr. Coke left New York and journeyed in a southerly direction, reaching Philadelphia on Saturday evening of the same week. The next morning Dr. Coke preached for Dr. Magaw, the rector of St. Paul's, and in the evening for the Methodists at St. George's. On Monday Drs. Magaw and White called on Coke, and Dr. White invited him to occupy his pulpit on the ensuing Sabbath. Dr. Coke was also presented to the governor of the State, who was an acquaintance of Wesley, and an admirer of the writings of John Fletcher, the Vicar of Madeley, who Wesley intended should be his successor in the management of British Methodism.* Coke could not at that time wait to accept Dr. White's courtesy, but pushed on southward, and the next Sunday, the 14th of November, he arrived with Whatcoat at Barratt's Chapel, near Frederica, in the State of Delaware.

This chapel was called after Judge Philip Barratt, who had contributed liberally to its erection, and who was one of the prominent laymen of early Methodism in Delaware. When it was being erected a gentleman asked what it was for, and being told that it was a place of worship for the Methodists he replied: "It is unnecessary to build such a house, for by the time that the war is over a corn-crib will hold them

* Stevens's *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 170.

all." The prediction, however, was not verified, for they were stronger than ever before. The records of a few months after this visit of Dr. Coke at Barratt's Chapel show that the American Methodists had one hundred and four preachers and eighteen thousand members.*

Dr. Coke preached in the chapel and administered the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to five or six hundred communicants. While Coke was preaching, Asbury entered, and after the sermon had been delivered they met for the first time, and the greeting was exceedingly cordial.

That day Dr. Coke stated to Asbury the plan for the future management of American Methodism. It is to be inferred that Dr. Coke supposed no action was necessary on the part of any persons excepting himself and Asbury, the two superintendents, and that they would have complete control of all the measures necessary for carrying out the new plan.

No doubt Asbury thought that as he had been general assistant he ought to be retained in the position of superintendent. He had previously presented his claim to Wesley, and doubtless others had written in his interest. Edward Dromgoole, one of the early Methodist ministers and a member of the Christmas Conference, in a letter to Wesley, written on the 24th of May, 1783, said :

"The preachers at present are united to Mr. As-

* Minutes for 1785.

bury, and esteem him very highly in love for his work's sake, and earnestly desire his continuance on the continent during his natural life, and to act as he does at present ; to wit, to superintend the whole work and go through all the circuits once a year. He is now well acquainted with the country, with the preachers and people, and has a large share in the affections of both ; therefore they would not willingly part with him." *

Notwithstanding his pre-eminent claim to a chief position, Asbury declined to accept the superintendency without his election by the American preachers. He records in his Journal this decision, and also the impressions made upon him at his first meeting with Coke. He says : " I came to Barratt's Chapel ; here, to my great joy, I met these dear men of God, Dr. Coke and Richard Whatcoat ; we were greatly comforted together. The doctor preached on ' Christ—our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.' Having had no opportunity of conversing with them before public worship, I was greatly surprised to see Brother Whatcoat assist by taking the cup in the administration of the sacrament. I was shocked when first informed of the intention of these my brethren in coming to this country. It may be of God. My answer then was, ' If the preachers unanimously choose me, I shall not act in the capacity I have hitherto done by Mr. Wesley's appointment.' " †

* *Arminian Magazine*, 1791. † *Asbury's Journal*, Nov. 15, 1784.

Thomas Ware says that after Dr. Coke had shown his credentials to Mr. Asbury the latter said: "Doctor, we will call the preachers together, and the voice of the preachers shall be to me the voice of God. A Conference was accordingly agreed upon."* Mr. Asbury, in anticipation of this meeting with Dr. Coke, had also secured the presence of a number of preachers for the purpose of consultation, so that whatever was done should not be the act of one or two men merely. Dr. Coke says: "After dining in company with eleven of the preachers at our Sister Barratt's, about a mile from the chapel, I privately opened our plan to Mr. Asbury. He expressed considerable doubts concerning it, which I rather applauded than otherwise, but informed me that he had received some intimations of my arrival on the continent; and as he thought it probable I might meet him on that day, and might have something of importance to communicate to him from Mr. Wesley, he had, therefore, called together a considerable number of preachers to form a council, and if they were of opinion that it would be expedient immediately to call a Conference it should be done. They were accordingly called, and, after debate, were unanimously of opinion that it would be best immediately to call a Conference of all the traveling preachers on the continent."†

* *Methodist Quarterly Review*, vol. xiv, 1832, p. 97.

† Coke's Journal, in *Arminian Magazine*, Phila., 1789, pp. 243, 244.

Asbury's record is: "The design of organizing the Methodists into an Independent Episcopal Church was opened to the preachers present, and it was agreed to call a General Conference to meet at Baltimore the ensuing Christmas; as also that Brother Garrettson go off to Virginia to give notice thereof to our brethren in the South."*

Coke says: "We therefore sent off Freeborn Garrettson like an arrow from North to South, directing him to send messengers to the right and left, and to gather all the preachers together at Baltimore on Christmas eve. Mr. Asbury has also drawn up for me a route of about a thousand miles in the meantime. He has given me his black (Harry by name), and borrowed an excellent horse for me. I exceedingly reverence Mr. Asbury; he has so much wisdom and consideration, so much meekness and love; and under all this, though hardly to be perceived, so much command and authority. He and I have agreed to use our joint endeavors to establish a school or college."†

Thus at the very beginning, and before the Church was organized, true to early Methodist associations, an educational institution was proposed, and the university graduate and the man who studied Greek and Hebrew without the aid of a college united in an effort

* Asbury's Journal, Nov. 15, 1784.

† Stevens's *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, volume ii, pp. 171, 172.

to plant a college in the new country, and under the control of the new Church, the organization of which had not yet been effected.

After the council of preachers had deliberated and decided upon a Conference, Garrettson instantly started on his mission. He says: "It was concluded that I should go through the continent and call a Conference at Baltimore immediately. Within six weeks, after traveling upward of twelve hundred miles, I settled the business, besides preaching almost every day once, and sometimes twice, and made my return." *

Garrettson must have moved with great rapidity, and was by Coke very appropriately called his arrow, but he was not able to apprise every preacher. The Rev. Jesse Lee, the first historian of American Methodism, who was missed by this "arrow," and who was not present when the Conference convened, makes this note in his history: "Mr. Freeborn Garrettson undertook to travel to the South to give notice to all the traveling preachers of this intended meeting. But being fond of preaching by the way, and thinking he could do the business by writing, he did not give timely notice to the preachers who were in the extremities of the work, and of course several of them were not at that Conference." †

* *The Experience and Travels of Mr. Freeborn Garrettson*, Philadelphia, 1791, p. 198.

† *Lee's History of the Methodists*, pp. 93, 94.

In addition to the movements of the flying "arrow" there were the journeyings of Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, the preachers who formed the council in Delaware, and doubtless others with whom they communicated. As a result, when the Conference assembled there were present nearly sixty preachers, many of whom had traveled great distances through the winter weather.

This General Conference, which is commonly spoken of as the Christmas Conference, because it was in session during the Christmas week, really began on the 24th of December, 1784. There has been a little confusion in the statements of some writers, but this date is fixed by Coke, Asbury, Whatcoat, and Black, who were present.

At ten o'clock on that day this memorable Conference began its session. The Conference was composed almost entirely of young men. Leaving out Coke, Asbury, Whatcoat, and Vasey, the most experienced minister had been in the service only ten years, one nine years, two eight years, two seven years, and the rest six, five, four, three, two years, and some less than a year. Coke was only thirty-seven, and Asbury was his senior by about two years. Vasey was about the same age as Asbury, and Whatcoat was about nine years older than Asbury.

It was indeed a body of young men, but they were men who thoroughly understood the American spirit and the needs occasioned by the disturbed ecclesiastical conditions of the country. **William Black**, who

was there all the way from Nova Scotia, says: "Perhaps such a number of holy, zealous, godly men never before met together in Maryland, perhaps not on the continent of America."* Nearly sixty preachers out of eighty-one, according to Coke, assembled that 24th of December, in what was called the Lovely Lane Meeting-house, a modest structure which after several evolutions has recently had its lineal successor in one of the most magnificent ecclesiastical edifices in the city of Baltimore, and we may say in the country.

Dr. Coke presided, and on taking the chair presented the letter which Wesley had addressed on the 10th of September, 1784, at Bristol, to "Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and our Brethren in America."† William Phœbus, one of the members of the Christmas Conference, says that Wesley sent Coke as "his apostle or messenger to us, with outlines of advice for us to adopt as we saw most conducive to the general good, recommending to us the New Testament for our pattern. Then, with his power and the fear of God, we assembled at the city of Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, and received Thomas Coke, LL.D., with his testimonials from the greatest man, to *us*, in the world."‡

The question then before the Conference was on

* Stevens's *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. ii, p. 186.

† See chap. iv, p. 229.

‡ Quoted from an Apology by Phœbus in Myles's *Chronological History of the People called Methodists*.

the acceptance of the plan which had been proposed, for one thing Asbury and other preachers insisted upon was that the whole matter must be left to the decision of the Conference. Consequently whatever was done, at that time, was not the action of Mr. Wesley, but the action of the Conference, and it is evident that, no matter what Mr. Wesley might have suggested, the preachers in America felt that it could not be binding without their concurrence.

It is needless, therefore, to take up space in any further discussion as to what Wesley intended. The real question is what the Conference understood and what the Conference did. However, those who were present show that they understood that Wesley intended them to form a Church, and in pursuance thereof, and of their own free will, they constituted themselves a Church. What else could Wesley mean when he gave them Articles of Religion, and a Service Book, both varying somewhat from those of the Church of England?

Asbury has said that "Mr. Wesley was called for near twelve or thirteen years repeatedly to do something for his people in America;"* and in his Journal, in a note under the entry of the fact that he had written an appeal to Mr. Wesley on the 16th of September, 1780, said: "The answer to this letter was made through Dr. Coke, Richard Whatcoat, and

* Asbury's *Valedictory Address*.

Thomas Vasey in 1784, who all came to America properly ordained.” *

They came as ordained ministers, and so were properly authorized to administer the sacraments; but did they not come with a further mission?

Dr. Coke, in his sermon delivered at the consecration of Asbury, said that “Mr. Wesley after long deliberation saw it his duty to form his society in America into an independent Church; but he loved the most excellent liturgy of the Church of England; he loved its rites and ceremonies, and therefore adopted them in most instances for the present case.” †

William Watters, the first native American preacher, and one of the members of the Christmas Conference, says: “On the 25th of December, 1784, our Conference met in Baltimore to consider the plan of Church government which Dr. Coke brought over recommended by Mr. Wesley.” ‡ Thomas Ware, who also was present, referring to Wesley’s letter, says: “It was read, analyzed, and cordially approved.” § Garrettson says: “We acceded to the method proposed by Mr. Wesley.” || Watters, referring to “the plan of Church government” which

* Asbury’s Journal, September 16, 1780, p. 309.

† Coke’s sermon at the consecration of Asbury.

‡ Watters’s *Autobiography*, 1806, p. 102.

§ Rev. T. Ware, in *Methodist Quarterly Review*, vol. xiv, 1832.

|| *The Experience and Travels of Mr. Freeborn Garrettson*, Philadelphia, 1791, p. 198.

the doctor had brought over, and which was "recommended by Mr. Wesley," says: "It was adopted and unanimously agreed to with great satisfaction, and we became, instead of a religious society, a separate Church." *

Watters, again alluding to the action of the Christmas Conference, says: "We formed ourselves into a separate Church. This change was proposed to us by Mr. Wesley after we had craved his advice on the subject, but could not take effect till adopted by us, which was done in a deliberate, formal manner, at a Conference called for that purpose, in which there was not one dissenting vote." †

Thomas Ware further says: "We had met to congratulate each other, and to praise the Lord for having raised the mind of our excellent Wesley above the fable of uninterrupted succession, and thereby paved our way to the delightful privileges we were henceforth to enjoy. The order of things devised by him for our organization as a Church filled us with solemn delight. It corresponded with what we did suppose we had a right to expect our God would do for us. We did, therefore, according to the best of our knowledge, receive and follow the advice of Mr. Wesley." ‡

Freeborn Garrettson, in a letter to the Rev. Alex-

* Watters's *Autobiography*, 1806, p. 102.

† *Ibid.*, 1806, p. 104.

‡ Article on the Christmas Conference, *Methodist Quarterly Review*, 1832.

ander McCaine, of the date of September 29, 1826, says: "I am fully of opinion that the members of the Christmas Conference were authorized by Mr. Wesley to organize themselves under an episcopal form of Church government. Nearly forty years have passed away, and I cannot charge my mind with every *minutia*; however, instructions were communicated from Mr. Wesley. As we were all young, humble, happy, and sincere, and well pleased with what he offered, I doubt not but that we followed his wishes to a *punctilio*." *

Ware, in his letter of December 1, 1828, says: "I am fully persuaded the preachers in 1784 believed they were acting in accordance with the will of Mr. Wesley when they adopted the episcopal form or the plan of the general superintendency." Having decided to constitute a Church, the question of a name had to be considered. Ware remarks that "Dr. Coke was in favor of taking the name Methodist Episcopal Church." † In another place he says: "The question arose, 'What name or title shall we take?' I thought I should be satisfied that we be denominated the Methodist Church; and so whispered to a brother sitting near me. But one proposed (I think it was John Dickins) that we should adopt the title of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The motion, on Mr.

* In *Methodist Quarterly Review*, 1830.

† Letter of Thomas Ware, December, 1828, published in *Defense of Truth*, Baltimore, 1829.

Dickins' suggestion, was carried, without, I think, a dissenting voice." *

Whatcoat says: "On the 24th we rode to Baltimore; at ten o'clock we began our Conference, in which we agreed to form a Methodist Episcopal Church, *in which the liturgy* (as presented by the Rev. John Wesley) *should be read*, and the sacraments be administered by a superintendent, elders, and deacons." †

So Asbury says: "It was agreed to form ourselves into an Episcopal Church, and to have superintendents, elders, and deacons." ‡

Having agreed to have the office of superintendency, the question was, Who should be superintendents? Wesley had appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Asbury to be joint superintendents, and had so stated in his circular letter to the American Methodists. This authority would have been deemed sufficient at any previous time and Asbury had accepted the appointment as general assistant. Probably no one but Asbury at this time would have disputed the sufficiency of the authority. In one sense probably even he did not dispute it. But a new situation had developed. The proposition was to become a complete church in every particular, but the strong organiza-

* Thomas Ware's *Autobiography*, p. 106.

† *Mems.*, p. 21, "The italics are his own." Quoted in Stevens's *History of Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. ii, pp. 183, 184.

‡ Asbury's Journal, p. 377.

tion which had grown up in America had by its existence amid difficulties and its self-support acquired the right, at least to some extent, of self-government.

Asbury refused to be a superintendent on the mere appointment of Mr. Wesley, and would consent only upon an election by the Conference. It is true that he took no risk, for the preachers had previously asked him to serve as general assistant, but his refusal secured two things; first, the self-government of the Conference, and, secondly, the control of the episcopal office by the Conference.

The Rev. Nicholas Snethen said "that he has heard Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and several members of the Conference declare that Mr. Asbury refused to serve as a superintendent, or bishop, without the election of the Conference," * and the same writer has observed that "Asbury, in securing to the General Conference the election of the bishops, by declining to serve under Mr. Wesley's appointment until he was elected by the American preachers, subserved the cause of independence." †

Asbury records in his Journal that both Dr. Coke and himself were unanimously elected joint superintendents. He says: "Dr. Coke and myself were unanimously elected to the superintendency of the Church." ‡ So that both superintendents became

* Reply to O'Kelly's *Apology*.

† Snethen's Sermon in the *Christian World*, 1841.

‡ Asbury's Journal, vol. i, pp. 377, 378.

such not by the appointment of Mr. Wesley, but by the vote of the Conference. The Conference organized the Church, and the Conference created and asserted its control over its episcopate.

On the second day Asbury was ordained deacon, and on the third day, which was Sunday, he was ordained elder. Had there been no ministers in orders present, the Conference, as we have seen, had the natural right, and especially under the law of necessity, to have performed the service of ordination without them; but as there were three ordained elders in the body it was proper that the service of ordination should be conducted by them. Hence, in the ordination of Asbury, Dr. Coke was assisted by Whatcoat and Vasey, who were also ordained presbyters.

On Monday he was set apart or consecrated as superintendent. This service was performed by Dr. Coke, assisted by Whatcoat and Vasey, and also, at the request of Asbury,* by the Rev. Philip William Otterbein, a minister of the German Reformed Church. Otterbein was born in Germany, and after receiving a thorough classical and theological education was ordained at the Hague. If there was any thing in succession (which is not claimed), then Asbury had the advantage of that which came through the English and the Continental lines; for Coke had been ordained by a bishop of the Church of England,

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 94.

Whatcoat and Vasey had been ordained by three episcopally ordained presbyters of the same church, and Otterbein represented that of Protestantism in Continental Europe. It will not be claimed that there was any special merit in this. It is interesting only as a matter of history.

Thirteen persons subsequently were ordained to the diaconate, and twelve of these were ordained elders.* Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday were spent mainly in enacting rules. Lee says: "Being now formed into a church, a regular plan of proceeding was laid, and a form of discipline drawn up."† The title of this Discipline of 1784 calls the new organization "The Methodist Episcopal Church in America."

One day was devoted to the consideration of the college project, and thus the Methodist Episcopal Church started out with an educational spirit in harmony with the spirit of original Methodism which began in the University of Oxford.

The Church, therefore, had been organized with Articles of Religion and a liturgy which was an abridgment of the English Book of Common Prayer. This service was at once put into use, and the superintendents and other elders wore gowns like those used by the presbyters of the Church of England.

Lee says: "At this time the prayer-book, as re-

* Stevens's *History of Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. ii, p. 184.

† Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 95.

vised by Mr. Wesley, was introduced among us; and in the large towns, and in some country places, our preachers read prayers on the Lord's day; and in some cases the preachers read part of the morning service on Wednesdays and Fridays." He also remarks that "the superintendents and some of the elders introduced the custom of wearing gowns and bands."*

According to the High Church view, the General Conference that organized the Methodist Episcopal Church in America was composed of clergy and laity; for there were ordained and unordained men present, and so both classes were represented in the transaction. According to Methodism of that day,

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, 1810, p. 107. Dr. Abel Stevens says: "The Church, in the emphasized language of Whatcoat, 'agreed to form a Methodist Episcopal Church, *in which the liturgy* (as presented by the Rev. John Wesley) *should be read.*' This organic provision has never been formally repealed. The General Conference has, indeed, at a later session, directed that, for the 'establishment of uniformity in public worship,' 'the morning service shall consist of singing, prayer, the reading of a chapter out of the Old Testament, and another out of the New, and preaching.' But it has not directed what the two lessons shall be, nor what the form of prayer; its prescription would nearly correspond with the original 'Sunday Service,' and as the latter has never been formally abrogated, any Methodist society could legally adopt it. Public opinion has, however, silently but effectually rendered it obsolete. It was used for a few years, in both cities and country, in the principal churches; but Sabbath love-feasts, or other extra services, frequently pre-occupied the time allotted to it, and, from being occasionally omitted, it at last fell into entire disuse." See Stevens's *History of Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. ii, pp. 197, 198.

they were all clergymen, and the government of the Church was by the laity conceded to be in the hands of the ministers, so that the then legal power performed the work. The absent ministers acquiesced, and the lay members in the Churches accepted the new arrangement.

Dr. Coke, when he stopped at Philadelphia, on his way to meet Asbury, apprised the members of what was proposed. Referring to that visit he says, in his *Journal* of Sunday evening, November 7, 1784, that he preached "to a large congregation in our own chapel on the necessity of the witness of the Spirit. After preaching I opened to the society our new plan of Church government, and I have reason to believe that they all rejoice in it." *

Coke says of the Church in New York: "We expected that this society would have made the greatest opposition to our plan, but, on the contrary, they have been most forward to promote it. They have already put up a reading-desk and railed in a communion table." †

Watters says the new arrangement "gave great satisfaction through all our societies." ‡

Lee observes that "the Methodists were pretty generally pleased at our becoming a Church, and heartily united together in the plan which the Con-

* Coke's *Journal*, in the Philadelphia *Arminian Magazine*, 1789.

† Coke's *Journal*, in *Arminian Magazine*, Amer., June, 1789.

‡ Watters's *Autobiography*, p. 102.

ference had adopted; and from that time religion greatly revived." *

Asbury states that "every heart leaped with joy," and "the members of society, and the congregations in America, embraced our Church form and order." †

In the meantime, though the American Methodists knew nothing of it, Dr. Seabury had secured, on the 14th of November, 1784, what, according to the Church of England, was an irregular consecration, from Scotch non-juring bishops, in a private house, in a narrow lane called Longacre, "where public carriages never passed," in the city of Aberdeen, Scotland. With this consecration he returned to America, and reached Newport on the 20th of June, 1785, more than six months after the Methodist Episcopal Church had been organized, and when he did return he only represented a small number of the clergy in a limited locality.

The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States had not yet been organized. On the 27th of September, 1785, more than nine months after the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, a convention of some who had been connected with the Church of England assembled in the city of Philadelphia. There were representatives from seven States, from New York to Virginia, and in addition

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 107.

† Asbury's *Valedictory Address*.

South Carolina. "In consequence of their consultations," the Protestant Episcopal Church "became organized and united in those States under a general constitution which, though acted under, being the only one in existence, was not finally ratified until the convention of 1789."*

The Methodist Episcopal Church, however, was united throughout the entire country. As yet in the new Protestant Episcopal Church there was no bishop, for Bishop Seabury was not connected with it, but on the 14th of September, 1786, a State convention assembled in Pennsylvania, and unanimously elected Dr. White to the bishopric. "Three only of the clergy of that State, besides himself, were present. The other two clergymen belonging to it afterward expressed their concurrence."†

Dr. Provoost having been selected in New York, both of these ministers went to England, and on the 4th of February, 1787, received consecration in Lambeth Chapel. Returning in April they entered upon their episcopal duties in America. They represented the English succession and belonged to the Protestant Episcopal Church, which extended over a part of the country, while Bishop Seabury represented the succession through the Scotch non-jurors, and had a separate organization in the State of Connecticut. Bishop Seabury and his diocese did not unite with the others until the convention of September, 1789.

* *Memoir of Bishop White*, p. 106.

† *Ibid*, p. 116.

When Bishop Seabury offered to connect himself with the convention, some "entertained scruples in regard to the propriety of admitting him as a member," because he was then "in the receipt of half-pay" for service rendered as "chaplain to a British regiment during the war," but he was, nevertheless, admitted.*

Now, the Protestant Episcopal Church had three bishops, but Bishop Provoost "was unwilling to recognize the validity of the Scotch succession." Dr. White believed it was valid, but others denied the validity of Bishop Seabury's consecration. At one of the sessions of the convention of 1789, however, "a resolution was unanimously passed in favor of the validity of Bishop Seabury's consecration." †

In the same year an application was made to the bishops for the consecration of the Rev. Edward Bass, who had been elected bishop by the clergy of Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Bishop Provoost was unwilling to join in a consecration with Bishop Seabury, because he looked upon that as a recognition of the Scotch succession, and also because he held that he was positively obligated not to consecrate a bishop until there were three bishops in the English line. Dr. White excused himself on the ground "that his faith had been impliedly pledged to the English prelates ;

* Bishop White's *Memoirs of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Second Ed., p. 145

† Wilson's *Memoir of Bishop White*, 1839, p. 118.

that three bishops should be consecrated in England before any consecration in America, so that the succession should be continued in the English line." * So that, though the bishops were three in number, there were for practical episcopal purposes only two, and, according to the ideas of these two bishops, their Church organization was not complete until September, 1790, when Dr. Madison, of Virginia, was consecrated in England.

The first Protestant Episcopal consecration of a bishop in America took place in 1792, when Dr. Claggett was consecrated bishop for Maryland. "It was performed by Bishop Provoost, assisted by the other two bishops consecrated in England and by Bishop Seabury. There was an apprehension on the part of the last named bishop that it was intended to exclude him from taking any part in the expected consecration. But there was no objection to Bishop Seabury's uniting with them in the act, as this could not weaken the English line of succession, Bishop Provoost, for the sake of peace, waiving his objection to having any thing to do with the Scotch succession, which he thought irregular." † So when they had the canonical number of three bishops of the English line, and Bishop Seabury did not count whether he took part or not, he was permitted to take part. Bishop White presided at every subsequent consecration as long as he lived, but Bishop Seabury

* *Memoir of Bishop White*, p. 119.

† *Ibid.*, p. 121.

never again participated. He was not present at the Triennial Convention of 1795, where the Rev. Robert Smith, D.D., was consecrated for South Carolina, and he died in February of the next year.*

The Protestant Episcopal Church was not organized until September, 1785, it was not united until 1789, and it did not consider itself complete, with three perfectly valid bishops of the English line, until 1790. The Methodist Episcopal Church had started as a complete ecclesiastical organization years before this. It antedated by nearly a year the initial organization of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and by nearly six years the perfected organization of that communion; and now it stretched from the extreme South through the North and into the British dominions, and spread west of the Alleghanies and into Ohio, and about this time had 250 preachers, and 76,153 members.† So in a little over five years the ministers had more than trebled, and the membership had more than quadrupled.

Thus from the early evangelistic movement called Methodism had evolved the organic form called the Methodist Episcopal Church, which at once entered upon its mission with vigorous vitality.

* Bishop Seabury held that the Methodists had a presbyterial ordination. In a letter to Dr. Smith, written in August, 1785, he said: "Mr. Wesley is only a presbyter, and all his ordinations presbyterian" (*Life of Bishop Seabury*, Third Edition, p. 230).

† Minutes of 1791.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SUPERINTENDENCY.

AS the Conference had agreed to establish a superintendency, and had elected two superintendents, we may pause to ask what it understood the nature of this superintendency to be.

The united testimony of the members of that Conference whose declarations have been quoted shows that the Conference understood it was adopting the sort of superintendency which Mr. Wesley had proposed.

Therefore their act must be interpreted in the light of Mr. Wesley's intention. This throws us back upon his views of Church government and ecclesiastical orders. As has been shown, he believed that Church government might be that of the independent church, or an association of churches under a presbytery, or by an episcopate supervising a number of congregations and ministers. While he believed that Christians were free to accept any of these forms of government, he preferred the episcopal. His idea of the bishopric was that it did not possess any higher order than belonged to a presbyter, and that any presbyter actually performing the duties of oversight

was a bishop ; and so he considered himself at once a presbyter and as true an *episcopos* as any man in England or in all Europe.

With him a bishop was an overseer, and the difference between a presbyter and a bishop was one not of clerical order, but of the function of oversight. According to this, a presbyter without oversight would be a mere presbyter, but a presbyter who was engaged in overseeing would be a bishop. In other words, the distinction would not be as to order, but as to office.

Dr. Abel Stevens, the distinguished historian of Methodism, 'succinctly states Wesley's views in the following summary :

Bishops and presbyters, or elders, are of the same order, and have essentially the same prerogatives ; but that, for convenience, some of this order may be raised to the episcopal office, and some of the functions originally pertaining to the whole order, as ordination, for example, may be confined to them ; the presbyter thus elevated being but *primus inter pares*—the first among equals—a presiding officer.*

As the American Methodists accepted Wesley's proposals, they consequently accepted his ideas and expressed intention as to the nature of the superintendency, and if so they could not have regarded their superintendents as having any higher clerical order than that of presbyters, but that they were merely presbyters charged with the duty of oversight in the Church of God.

* Stevens's *History of Methodism*, vol. ii, p. 221.

In his circular letter to the American Methodists, Wesley said :

As our American brethren are now totally disentangled both from the state and the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again, either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive Church.

Now, his idea of the bishopric of the New Testament and of the primitive Church was simply an office of oversight filled by a presbyter, or, in other words, the work of oversight performed by an elder, and he understood that the Methodists in the United States were following his idea of "the New Testament plan" of Church government.*

The American Methodists of that day professed to follow the principles of the primitive Christian Church, and Ezekiel Cooper, who was present at the first meeting of Coke and Asbury, and who was one of the most prominent Methodist ministers of the period immediately following the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, says :

From that time the Methodist societies in the United States became an independent Church, under the Episcopal

* In a letter written February 25, 1785, to Mr. John Stretton, of Harbor Grace, Newfoundland, Mr. Wesley says: "Last autumn Dr. Coke sailed from England, and is now visiting the flock in the midland provinces of America, and settling them on the New Testament plan, to which they all willingly and joyfully conform, being all united, as by one Spirit, so in one body" (Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., vol. vii, p. 226).

mode and form of government—designing, professing, and resolving “to follow the Scriptures, and the primitive Church,” according to the advice and counsel of Mr. Wesley.*

They knew what Mr. Wesley meant by following “the Scriptures and the primitive Church,” and, in acting according to his wishes, they accepted his ideas on this point.

Dr. Coke, who presented the new arrangement to the Christmas Conference, “argued that the plan of general superintendency was in fact a species of episcopacy.” † Now, when he told the American preachers that the proposed “superintendency was in fact a species of episcopacy,” he meant that, while it was a kind of episcopacy, it was different from some other kind or kinds of episcopacy.

That the plan of superintendency was for the purpose of oversight, and was, therefore, an episcopate, is plain, and the simple question is as to what “species of episcopacy” it was. We have seen Wesley’s view. What was Coke’s? On his voyage to America he made the following entry in his Journal, under date of Monday, Oct. 18, 1784:

I have waded through Bishop Hoadley’s *Treatises on Conformity and Episcopacy*, 565 pages octavo. He is a powerful reasoner, but is, I believe, wrong in his premises. However, he is very candid. In one place he allows the truth of

* Cooper on Ashbury, p. 109.

† Letter of Thomas Ware, December, 1828, published in *Defense of Truth*, Baltimore, 1829.

St. Jerome's account of the presbyters of Alexandria, who, as Jerome informs us, elected their own bishop for two hundred years, from the time of St. Mark to the time of Dionysius. In another place he makes this grand concession, namely: "I think not an uninterrupted line of succession of regularly ordained bishops necessary" (page 489). In several other places he grants that there may be cases of necessity which may justify a presbyterian ordination. But he really seems to prove one thing. That it was the universal practice of the Church, from the latter end of the lives of the apostles to the time of the Reformation, to invest the power of ordination in a superior Church officer to the presbyters, whom the Church soon after the death of the apostles called bishop by way of eminence."

From this it is to be inferred that he did not believe in uninterrupted succession of bishops, or that a bishop was of a higher order than a presbyter, but that he was a presbyter occupying a superior office, and called bishop to distinguish this "superior church officer" from the other presbyters. It is certain that though he had been appointed superintendent by Wesley he did not consider his superintendency gave him any higher clerical order, but that he remained a presbyter. In the certificate of consecration which he gave Asbury, Coke speaks of himself as a "presbyter," and also as a "superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America," * thus acknowledging his order to be that of an elder while his office was that of a superintendent.

In a foot-note to his sermon delivered when Asbury

* Asbury's Journal, p. 378.

was formally inducted into the superintendency, Coke says, in reference to his use of the phrase, "the bishop of Philadelphia," "I here use the word *bishop* in its present sense, as signifying an officer of the Church superior to the presbyters."* In his mind a bishop is an *officer* who is superior as such to the body of presbyters, but not superior in order. Consequently, though Superintendent Coke styles himself, in the certificate he gave Asbury, "a presbyter," showing that he recognized that to be his *order*, while the superintendency, whose functions he then was exercising, was his *office*, so in the certificate there is not a word about an episcopal order, but the simple statement that "he did set apart the said Francis Asbury for the *office* of a superintendent."† In his estimation, therefore, the superintendency was an office but not an order, and the officer who was superintendent was an elder in order.

The founders of the Methodist Episcopal Church defined their superintendency as an office, while they never officially speak of the *order* of bishops or superintendents. Jesse Lee, who was one of the leading ministers of that day, and who was thoroughly informed respecting the early views and transactions, says: "At this Conference we formed ourselves into a regular Church by the name of the Methodist Episcopal Church, making at the same time the episcopal

* *Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review*, July, 1840.

† Bangs's *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. i, p. 157.

office elective." * The early Minutes (1785) also use the word "*office*," and speak of the position as the "episcopal office." Indeed, as Lee and the Minutes show, the early Church never spoke of the episcopacy as an order, nor as an order *and* an office, but solely as an *office*, which they made elective; and the only conclusion which can be drawn is that they did not consider their episcopacy a distinct and higher order, but simply an office of superintendency.

This, then, was "the species of episcopacy" to which Dr. Coke referred. There were bishops who professed to have a higher clerical order than that which was possessed by presbyters. This, however, was a different "species of episcopacy." It was an episcopacy which was an office of superintendency without the higher order.

Ezekiel Cooper, who records that the Christmas Conference and the fathers of the Methodist Episcopal Church followed the example of the New Testament and the early Christian Church, tells us what was understood to be the teaching of the primitive Church. He says:

In the primitive Church the terms overseers, presbyters, bishops, and elders were indiscriminately appointed to the same order of men.†

So, in following the primitive Church, they made their superintendents presbyters. Cooper does not

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 94.

† Cooper on Asbury, p. 215.

leave us to an inference, but clearly affirms "the validity of our ordination and our authorized ministry as a *presbyterial* episcopacy." * Again he says :

The Methodist presbyterial episcopacy is nearly that which Archbishop Usher proposed and recommended to King Charles I. for the national episcopacy of the Church of England, and which the king agreed to; but the irritation of parties at that time ran so high, and the proposal of Usher and the agreement of the king being delayed so long, that the proposition was rejected. But it stands as a proof that "presbyterial episcopacy" was recommended and considered valid by Usher; as it also was by others of the most illustrious prelates of the Church of England, and the most eminent divines of the Reformation.†

This shows very conclusively that this author and early authority understood that a "presbyterial episcopacy" was the "species of episcopacy" which the Methodist Episcopal Church had in its superintendency. The incumbent of its episcopate was a presbyter.

Whatcoat says it was "agreed" that the ordinations should be "by a presbytery," and again, that the ordinations should be "by imposition of the hands of the superintendent and elders."‡ The superintendent was to be one of the presbyters who would perform the service of ordination, for the ordinations were to be "by a presbytery," and, consequently, the superintendent was himself a presbyter.

* Cooper on Asbury, p. 215.

† *Ibid.*, p. 230.

‡ *Memoirs*, p. 21; Stevens's *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. ii, p. 184.

An indication of the fact that the superintendents regarded themselves as presbyters, and not of a higher order, is found in the fact that Coke and Asbury did not wear such episcopal robes as they had frequently seen on the bishops of the Church of England, but each wore the gown of an Anglican presbyter.

One of the pioneer preachers thus describes an ordination service which took place in Uniontown, Pa., in 1788 :

Mr. Asbury officiated, not in the costume of the lawn-robed prelate, but as the plain presbyter in gown and band, assisted by Richard Whatcoat, elder, in the same clerical habit. Not only did the preachers appear in sacerdotal robes, but the morning service was read as abridged by Mr. Wesley.*

Thus by wearing the presbyter's gown they recognized the fact that though they were superintendents in office they were presbyters in order.

William Phœbus, who was a member of the Christmas Conference, remarks that Wesley recommended "the New Testament for our pattern," and says, "We thought it not robbery to call our society a Church, having in it, and of it, several presbyters and a president."† The superintendent was a presiding officer, and so Wesley appointed Coke "to preside over the flock of Christ."

We have noticed that the Conference made "the

* Strickland's *Life of Asbury*, p. 179.

† Myles's *Chronological History of the People Called Methodists*, p. 165.

episcopal office elective, and the elected superintendent amenable to the body of ministers and preachers." * This is very significant, for a higher order bishopric is not amenable to ministers of a lower order. That these superintendents were made amenable to the ministers and preachers shows that they regarded and treated the superintendency not as an order, but as an office. In the higher-order episcopacy the lower orders are amenable to it, but here the superintendents were amenable to the very men they superintended.

It is to be remembered that this Conference and all the early General Conferences were composed of all the preachers, whether they were elders or not. When the Christmas Conference opened there were only three, including Superintendent Coke, who had received elder's orders; and even after others were ordained at this Conference "the body of the ministers and preachers" was composed mainly of unordained men.

That they made "the elected superintendent amenable to the body of ministers and preachers," most of whom had no orders at all, shows that they could not have regarded their superintendency in the light of a ministerial order, but rather as an executive office.

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 94; Minutes of 1785. The Discipline made at the Christmas Conference has the following: "To whom is the superintendent amenable? *Ans.* To the Conference, who have power to expel him for improper conduct, if they see it necessary."—(Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 98).

On the idea of an office, simply, there was some reason in all having a voice in the election of a superintendent, because all were to be superintended by him; and, so, for the same reason, there was propriety in his being responsible to them; but the arrangement would be an ecclesiastical absurdity, if the superintendency were a higher order, for the superintendent to be amenable to those of a lower order and to those who had no orders at all.

Even if the Conference had been composed entirely of elders, this amenability would imply that the superintendents were not of a higher order, and such amenability could only be on the ground that the superintendency was merely an office of an executive or jurisdictional character, and hence responsible to the body which created it.

Another remarkable action of the Christmas Conference, as shown by the Discipline therein prepared, appears in the second question and answer:

What can be done in order to the future union of the Methodists? *Ans.* During the life of the Reverend Mr. Wesley, we acknowledge ourselves his sons in the Gospel, ready, in matters belonging to Church government, to obey his commands; and we do engage after his death to do every thing that we judge consistent with the cause of religion in America, and the political interest of these States, to preserve and promote our union with the Methodists in Europe.*

The only point that need be considered here is that which concerns their relation to Mr. Wesley.

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, 1810, p. 95.

The members of the Conference recognized him as their supreme ecclesiastical authority, and agreed, "in matters belonging to Church government, to obey his commands." They consequently recognized him as occupying a higher position in relation to them than their own superintendents. It follows, therefore, first, that having thus acknowledged him as their supreme authority in ecclesiastical affairs they must have accepted his doctrine as to the episcopacy, namely, that a bishop had no higher order than a presbyter; and, secondly, in making Mr. Wesley, who was only a presbyter in order, the chief authority in the Church they practically declared there was no higher order.

Further, that they recognized a presbyter as supreme, even over their own superintendents, shows that they did not esteem their superintendency or episcopacy an order above the eldership, for certainly they would not have made one of an inferior order superior in authority to those of a higher order.

The Christmas Conference also placed the following in the Discipline:

As the ecclesiastical as well as civil affairs of these United States have passed through a very considerable change by the Revolution, what plan of Church government shall we hereafter pursue? *Ans.* We will form ourselves into an Episcopal Church under the direction of superintendents, elders, deacons, and helpers,* etc.

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, pp. 95, 96.

They declared they were accepting Mr. Wesley's plan, and, as they accepted the very title of superintendent, which Wesley had given, as well as the men he had appointed, the only reasonable supposition is that they accepted the superintendency in the sense Wesley intended; and, as his declaration was "that bishops and presbyters are the *same order*," they could not have understood that he was giving or that they were receiving officers of a higher order than that of presbyters; and, if so, they must have understood the word superintendent as indicating, not an order, but an office.

This is further indicated by the fact that they voted Asbury to be a superintendent before he had become either elder or deacon. So Wesley had appointed him to be superintendent, and evidently Wesley considered his mere appointment sufficient to give the authority without any action on the part of the Conference. The Conference, however, by its vote affirmed its power to determine who should be superintendent.

Now, that Wesley should make a man not in orders a superintendent shows that he did not consider the position an order; and the action of the Conference in electing a man superintendent before he was in orders shows that the Conference did not look upon the superintendency as an order but as an office of supervision.

But it may be said that the superintendent was

set apart with a formal service. That may be, and it was perfectly proper that there should be some formality and some religious service used in setting apart one who was to occupy such a responsible position in the Church, but it does not follow that the service gave an order. A service cannot give any thing more than that which was intended by those who employ the service, and the nature of such a service is to be interpreted by the declared intention of those who use the service. The question at issue, therefore, is whether this service was intended to place the presbyter in a higher order.

Mr. Wesley, who gave the service, could not have intended it in that sense, for he held that there was no higher order than that of the eldership, and said, at the very time he gave them the service, that "bishops and presbyters are the same order." That the Christmas Conference held Wesley's view is asserted by Bishop Simpson in his *Cyclopedia of Methodism*. Referring to the ordinations performed by Mr. Wesley, he says :

This ordination was performed because, according to his view of the primitive episcopacy, bishops and presbyters were of the same order. This view was entertained by the ministers who met in Conference or convention in 1784 and organized the Methodist Episcopal Church.*

So the members of Conference, accepting from their supreme ecclesiastical authority this idea of the prim-

* Art. "Methodist Episcopacy."

itive episcopacy, could not have supposed that in using such a service they were giving any order above the eldership, for according to that view they did not believe there was any higher order. Therefore, looking upon the superintendency only as an office—"the episcopal office," as they termed it—they must have regarded the ceremony simply as a formal service of installation inducting the elected person, in an appropriate and solemn manner, into said office.

That there may have been some inexactness in the use of terms by some of the members of the Conference is quite possible, and perhaps the wonder should be that there was not more; for Asbury says, "We were in great haste, and did much business in a little time."* Indeed, we should not be surprised if it be discovered that even Mr. Wesley lacked precision in this very thing, for the service for the American Methodists was evidently prepared in great haste, and is characterized by elimination rather than reconstruction. A little further on we will see that the American Methodists did not consider that the service had any virtue in the way of adding any thing to the elected officer. The first official act in the Conference was the presentation and reading of Wesley's Circular Letter. This was the charter under which the Conference acted, and every thing that was done must be interpreted in the light of this document.

* Asbury's Journal, p. 378.

The part which bears specially upon the superintendency is that which declares in unmistakable terms the parity of bishops and presbyters as to order. Mr. Wesley's words are: "Lord King's account of the primitive Church convinced me many years ago that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain."

With such a declaration, so explicitly made, the members of the Christmas Conference could not have supposed Wesley was giving them an episcopacy that was higher in order than the eldership, and as they accepted his views of the primitive episcopacy they could not have intended to elect their superintendent to a higher order than that possessed by the presbyters.

This is a vital principle in Methodism. It was only on this principle that Wesley undertook to justify his ordinations. He held that if it was not true he had no right to ordain, but if it was true then he had a right to ordain; and it was on this principle that the early American Methodists justified their course.

Every thing connected with the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church is to be read in the light of this declaration—"Bishops and presbyters are the same order." It is the key-note of every utterance. Careless expressions or inaccurate use of words cannot affect this. The doubtful is to be interpreted in the light of the clear, and not the certain by that which is uncertain.

The whole organism was based on this principle that there was no higher order in the Church than that possessed by a presbyter, and it is not to be supposed that the organizers of the Church did any thing which was a violation of this fundamental principle of their charter of rights.

Consequently, as there was no distinction of order between the superintendent and any other presbyter, the distinction must have been one of office; and all the facts cited show that the Conference which organized the Methodist Episcopal Church held views which harmonized with the teaching of Wesley that bishops were the same in order as presbyters, and viewed the superintendency as a superior office, and the superintendent merely as a superior officer. Their effort was to return to the simple episcopate of the early Christian Church.

CHAPTER VII.

THE EPISCOPATE FROM 1784 UNTIL THE DEATH OF ASBURY.

THE Christmas Conference in its action did not use the word bishop in reference to its superior officers, but referred to them as superintendents. When Dr. Coke printed the sermon which he delivered at the setting apart of Asbury he added a footnote, as we have seen, in which he defined bishop as signifying a superior officer in the Church.

The Conference at which the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized adjourned on the 2d of January, 1785. That year the Conferences convened as heretofore, the last being held on the 15th of June. After the Conferences closed the Minutes were published.* Probably those of this year were issued in the latter part of June, or some time in July. They contain a copy of Wesley's Circular Letter, and after it appears the following statement :

Therefore at this Conference we formed ourselves into an independent Church; and, following the counsel of Mr. John

* "This year and the two succeeding years the Minutes were called 'The Minutes of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America.' The business of the three Conferences was all arranged in the Minutes as if all had been done at one time and place. And for the first time we had the Annual Minutes printed, which practice we have followed ever since" (*Lee's Hist. of the Methodists*, p. 118).

Wesley, who recommended the episcopal mode of Church government, we thought it best to become an Episcopal Church, making the episcopal office elective, and the elected superintendent or bishop amenable to the body of ministers and preachers.

This is the first time the word bishop appears in that which purports to be an official or semi-official document. It did not appear in the form of Discipline adopted by the Christmas Conference, neither does it appear in the record given in Lee's *History*.

In the same Minutes there is a foot-note referring to the word superintendents which Wesley uses in his letter. It is as follows :

As the translators of our version of the Bible have used the English word bishop instead of superintendent, it has been thought by us that it would appear more scriptural to adopt their term bishop.*

This suggestion, and the use of the form "superintendent or bishop" in the other paragraph, were without the authority of the Conferences. The insertions were evidently the work of the editor or editors who combined the reports of the three Conferences.

The superintendents themselves appear to have prepared or supervised the preparation of the Minutes for publication, and so the editors had opportunity to make such insertions or comments as they thought necessary for the elucidation of various points, and these insertions were made, no doubt, in good faith on

* Minutes for 1785.

the part of the editor ; but, as the Conferences had adjourned before the combined Minutes appeared, the editor and not the Conference is to be held responsible for them. Sometimes, however, it is rather difficult to distinguish the work of the editor from the action of the Conference.

It is probable that, to some extent, both Coke and Asbury were affected by the example of Wesley, who, having gradually created his government, would not divide the responsibility with others. In a letter of the 13th of January, 1790, a little more than a year before his death, he said : " As long as I live the people shall have no share in choosing either stewards or leaders among the Methodists." *

So the Rev. Thomas Ware says :

Mr. Wesley had been in the habit of calling his preachers together, not to legislate, but to confer. Many of them he found to be excellent counselors, and he heard them respectfully on the weighty matters which were brought before them ; but the right to *decide* all questions he reserved to himself. This he deemed the more excellent way ; and as we had volunteered and pledged ourselves to obey, he instructed the doctor, conformably to his own usage, to put as few questions to vote as possible, saying, " If you, Brother Asbury, and Brother Whatcoat are agreed it is enough." †

It is just possible that Coke and Asbury thought they had the right to do some things without receiving authority from the Conference, and they may have carried this principle into the matter of editing

* Dr. Jennings's *Exposition*, p. 92.

† Ware's *Life*, p. 130.

the early Minutes, either making the comments themselves or allowing others to make them.

As early as November 27, 1785, we find Asbury engaged in reconstructing the Discipline, though there is no record that he was given authority to do so. His Journal of that date says:

For some time past I had not been satisfied with the order and arrangement of our form of Discipline; and, persuaded that it might be improved without difficulty, we accordingly set about it, and during my confinement in James City completed the work, arranging the subject-matter thereof under their proper heads, divisions, and sections.

At that period he was detained by a swollen foot, and so he occupied his time in rearranging the Discipline. Up to that time the Discipline consisted of a series of questions and answers, and Asbury's idea of arranging the matter systematically, "under their proper heads, divisions, and sections," was in the line of improvement, even if it was not authorized.

Dr. Coke had left America shortly after the Christmas Conference, but returned in 1787, in time for the meeting of the Conference at Baltimore on the first day of May. This was a stormy session.

The nature and cause of the strife will throw some rays of light upon the nature of the new episcopate as viewed by those immediately interested. The Church represented in the Conference of 1784 formally agreed "in matters belonging to Church government to obey" Wesley's "commands."

This may have been at the request of Mr. Wesley, or at the suggestion of Dr. Coke, but there is no clear information on that point. Mr. Asbury, in a letter to the Rev. Joseph Benson, says: "After the Revolution we were called upon to give a printed obligation, which here follows, and could not be dispensed with—it must be: 'During the life of the Rev. Mr. Wesley, we acknowledge ourselves his sons in the Gospel, ready in matters belonging to Church government to obey his commands,' " etc.* Instead of separating entirely from Mr. Wesley when they made their new organization in 1784, they voluntarily and formally decided to continue their relationship, and to recognize him as their head and supreme authority. They conceded him the chief place of power, and recognized him as almost a despotic ruler over the new Episcopal Church. They acknowledged him to be above the Conference, and above Superintendent Coke and Superintendent Asbury. Of course, this all grew out of his peculiar relations as founder and head of general Methodism.

Wesley evidently understood that he held the highest official relation to American Methodism, and he asserted the right to nominate superintendents for the new Church, though he did not directly appoint them as he did at the beginning. He held also that he had a right to direct the superintendent and, through him, the preachers.

* Quoted in Atkinson's *Centennial Hist. of Amer. Meth.*, p. 56.

In view of this power which he believed he possessed, and which he believed the American Methodists had conceded him, he wrote the following letter to Dr. Coke :

LONDON, *September 6th*, 1786.

DEAR SIR: I desire that you would appoint a General Conference of all our preachers in the United States to meet at Baltimore on May the first, 1787, and that Mr. Richard Whatcoat may be appointed superintendent with Mr. Francis Asbury. I am, dear sir, your affectionate friend and brother,

JOHN WESLEY.

To the Rev. Dr. Coke.

When the Conference met in 1787 Dr. Coke announced the desire of Mr. Wesley, and the Conference understood Wesley to direct that Whatcoat should be made a superintendent. Lee says: "Mr. Wesley also directed that Richard Whatcoat should be ordained a joint superintendent with Mr. Asbury." * In this extract, by the way, is an example of the inexactness of some of the words and phrases in use in the early day, and an illustration of the qualified sense in which some of them are to be understood. Thus Lee uses the word *ordained*, whereas Wesley in his letter does not use that word, but the word "*appointed*." Lee says :

When this business was brought before the Conference most of the preachers objected, and would not consent to it. The reasons against it were, 1. That he was not qualified to take the charge of the Connection. 2. That they were apprehensive that if Mr. Whatcoat was ordained Mr. Wesley would recall Mr. Asbury, and he would return to England.†

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 126.

† *Ibid.*, p. 126.

So Garrettson says :

The fear arising in the minds of many of the members of this Conference lest Mr. Wesley should recall Mr. Asbury was the cause of R. Whatcoat's appointment being rejected." *

Very often the most influential reason is not that which people give first. So here the first reason, namely, Whatcoat's lack of qualification, which Lee gives, does not appear very strong, for subsequently, in 1800, they elected this very man bishop, and, what is more, he was the first elected after the Conference of 1784, and that in competition with this very historian, Jesse Lee.

Doubtless the question of relative qualification had some weight, but the determining reason was the second given by Lee, and which is corroborated by the evidence of Garrettson ; namely, that Wesley would order Asbury back to England and that Asbury would obey.

This was a confession of Wesley's acknowledged authority. Wesley had issued his order naming the minister he desired to be superintendent. The Conference did not deny that supreme authority had been conceded him, and now the ministers reveal a consciousness of his conceded power to remove one of their superintendents from his office.

Mr. Asbury said of Wesley :

He rigidly contended for a special and independent right of governing the chief minister or ministers of our order,

* Garrettson's *Semi-Centennial Sermon*, p. 20.

which in our judgment meant not only to put him out of office, but to remove him from the continent to elsewhere that our father saw fit, and that notwithstanding our constitution, and the right of electing every Church officer, and more especially our superintendent. We were told "not till after the death of Mr. Wesley could our constitution have its full operation."*

Wesley claimed that he had this power, and the preachers saw there was some ground for the claim, in his relation as founder and in their resolution of submission. This reveals very clearly the status of the superintendents as to clerical order, and it must be manifest that they had no order above that of elders.

If Mr. Wesley was not in order equal to Mr. Asbury, the superintendent, and in official position superior to him, how could he command him? But Wesley is in order only a presbyter, therefore Asbury could not be in order above a presbyter when he was under a presbyter's control. Presbyter Wesley is admitted to have authority over Superintendent Asbury, therefore Asbury cannot have any order above that of presbyter. Any other supposition would be inconsistent and contrary to the fitness of things. So when Presbyter Wesley gives directions to Superintendent Coke it can only be on the supposition that Coke has no higher order than that of presbyter. For one of a lower order to command one in a higher

* *Memoirs of Bishop Whatcoat*, by William Phœbus, M.D. New York, 1828.

order is unheard of, and would not be tolerated by the merest ecclesiastical novice. Certainly one trained like Mr. Wesley would never permit one in a lower order to direct him, and he would never think of commanding one who was higher in order than himself. Yet this presbyter commands a Methodist superintendent; therefore the superintendent cannot have any ministerial order higher than that of elder. The superintendents had conceded Mr. Wesley's right under the agreement, and the Conference had formally conceded his authority; and now the Conference is afraid that Wesley will exercise his power in recalling Asbury, and that Asbury will obey. This can only be explained on the ground that at this time Wesley, the superintendents, and the Conference did not consider that the superintendent had any higher order than that possessed by Wesley himself, and consequently that in order they were only elders, and that the distinction between them and other elders was of an official character—that the superintendents were in office but not in order above the other elders, and that Presbyter Wesley was in official position above them all.

Superintendent Coke maintained that the Conference was bound to appoint Whatcoat a superintendent. Lee says:

Dr. Coke contended that we were obliged to receive Mr. Whatcoat, because we had said in the Minutes taken at the Christmas Conference, when we were first formed into a

Church in 1784, 'During the life of the Rev. Mr. Wesley we acknowledge ourselves his sons in the Gospel, ready in matters belonging to Church government to obey his commands.'" *

But the Conference had reached a point where it was determined to decide for itself. In 1784, notwithstanding Mr. Wesley's appointment of superintendents, the Conference preferred by its own vote to say who should superintend. So, at this juncture, the ministers came to a similar decision and refused to elect the minister named by Mr. Wesley. Lee says:

Many of the members of that Conference (1787) argued that they were not at the Conference when that engagement was entered into, and they did not consider themselves bound by it. Other preachers, who had said they were "ready to obey his commands," said they did not feel ready *now* to obey his command.

The preachers at last agreed to depart from that engagement, which some of the elder brethren had formerly entered into, and in the next printed Minutes that engagement was left out.

They had made the engagement of their own accord and among themselves, and they believed they had a right to depart therefrom when they pleased, seeing it was not a contract made with Mr. Wesley, or any other person, but an agreement among themselves. It was further argued that Mr. Wesley, while in England, could not tell what man was qualified to govern us as well as we could who were present and were to be governed. We believed also that if Mr. Wesley was here himself he would be of the same opinion with us.

This step of receding from the above engagement was afterward considered by some disaffected persons as improper. If there was any thing improper in the business it was in entering into the engagement, and not in departing from it. †

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 126.

† *Ibid.*, p. 127.

The Rev. William Phœbus states that Dr. Coke had

some directions from Mr. Wesley to give the Conference; in which directions Richard Whatcoat was nominated for a third superintendent. One ventured to say that Mr. Wesley took too much on him—yea, too much to be borne with by Americans; that he might increase his impositions if his power were not checked. It might grow enormous, even to popery.*

We have nothing to say as to the soundness of all this reasoning. We merely record the facts.

The outcome of the whole matter was that notwithstanding the agreement made at the Christmas Conference to obey Mr. Wesley, the Conference of 1787 refused to have Whatcoat as a superintendent, and, recognizing the awkwardness of their position, they went further and annulled the agreement.

It is stated that when Asbury was informed of Mr. Wesley's desire he acquiesced, and that the Conference which met at Charleston did likewise. But when the proposition was brought before the Virginia Conference it was vigorously opposed by the Rev. James O'Kelly, one of the ablest leaders of the Conference. As all the preachers had not met this year in one Conference, it was agreed to submit the matter for final decision to the Conference which would be held in Baltimore, "on condition that the Virginia Conference might send a deputy to explain their sentiments." †

* *Memoirs of Bishop Whatcoat*, New York, 1823.

† Snethen's Reply to O'Kelly.

When the Baltimore Conference met, the superintendents called the elders together and formed a council to consider the matter, and "they, notwithstanding Coke's advocacy, decided adversely." *

O'Kelly urged, as reasons against the selection of Whatcoat, that "he did not consider the person adequate to the task on account of his age, and also that he was a stranger in the wilderness of America." †

When the case was submitted to the Conference, it decided against the selection of Whatcoat, and expunged the resolution to obey Mr. Wesley. This is what is spoken of as the removal of Mr. Wesley's name from the Minutes. ‡

It is not our province to discuss in all its bearings the wisdom or propriety of thus cutting the Gordian knot. It was the short way out of the difficulty, and good resulted from it. The spirit of the American Revolution still possessed these American ministers. It was another declaration of independence. It was a revolution, but to Wesley it seemed a rebellion. It was an emphatic declaration by the Conference that it meant to be above him who claimed to be superior to its superintendents. It was a proclamation that the General Conference would not permit any execu-

* Atkinson's *Centennial History of American Methodism*, p. 58.

† *Ibid.*, p. 58.

‡ Mr. Wesley's name, however, had not appeared in the Annual Minutes for 1786. The agreement in question had not been printed in the Annual Minutes. It appeared in the "Minutes," etc., "Composing a Form of Discipline," which was a different publication.

tive power or official authority to be above itself; and in making their decision they actually deposed Wesley, whom they had previously made their chief superintendent, and this assertion implies that they recognized no higher order than that which was possessed by members on the floor of the Conference.

This action was a heavy blow to Mr. Wesley, who complained of it, and especially that Asbury, as he supposed, had not exerted himself to avert it. In a letter written on the 31st of October, 1789, Mr. Wesley said :

I was a little surprised when I received some letters from Mr. Asbury affirming that no person in Europe knew how to direct those in America. Soon after he flatly refused to receive Mr. Whatcoat in the character I sent him. He told George Shadford, "Mr. Wesley and I are like Cæsar and Pompey; he will bear no equal, and I will bear no superior." And, accordingly, he quietly sat by until his friends voted my name out of the American Minutes. This completed the matter, and showed that he had no connection with me.*

In a letter to Whatcoat, Wesley said :

It was not well judged of Brother Asbury to *suffer*, much less indirectly encourage, the foolish step in the last Conference. Every preacher present ought, both in duty and in prudence, to have said, "Brother Asbury, Mr. Wesley is your father, consequently ours." Candor will affirm this in the face

* Letter published by the Rev. Mr. Hammett in Charleston. Dr. Atkinson, in his *Centennial History of American Methodism*, p. 60, says: "The understanding appears to be that Wesley in attributing this language to Asbury was mistaken."

of the world. It is highly probable that disallowing *me* will, as soon as my head is laid, occasion a total breach between the English and American Methodists. They will naturally say, "If they can do without us we can do without them." But they would find a greater difference than they imagine. Next would follow a separation among themselves.

Mr. Asbury did not admit these allegations. He thus wrote :

And why was I thus charged ? Because I did not establish Mr. Wesley's absolute authority over the American Connection. For myself, this I had submitted to, but the Americans were too jealous to bind themselves to yield in all things relative to Church government. Mr. Wesley was a man they had never seen—was three thousand miles off—how might submission in such a case be expected ? Brother Coke and myself gave offense to the Connection by enforcing Mr. Wesley's will in some matters.

As to the rescinding of the resolution to obey Mr. Wesley, Asbury said : "At the first General Conference I was mute and modest when it passed, and I was mute when it was expunged."

The Rev. James O'Kelly publicly charged that Mr. Asbury was one of the principal parties in this transaction. In his *Apology* he said : "After these things Francis took with him a few chosen men, and in a clandestine manner expelled John, whose surname was Wesley, from the Methodist Episcopal Church."

It would seem that this statement needed some qualification, for it was the Conference that took

action. The Rev. Nicholas Snethen, who replied to Mr. O'Kelly, states that Mr. Asbury gave him

a particular detail of every circumstance relative to himself that had relation to the leaving of Mr. Wesley's name out of the American Minutes, from which it appears that Mr. Asbury was not deserving of the smallest blame in the whole business.

To this he adds :

Mr. Asbury neither made the motion nor advocated it; the whole case was constitutionally carried through the Conference, and voted by a fair majority. Mr. Asbury, indeed, foresaw the consequence when the question was in contemplation, and informed the patrons of it that he expected all the blame would be imputed to him if it should be carried. Had he been under the influence of the spirit of prophecy his fears could not have been better grounded.*

It is clear, however, that Asbury never was satisfied with the resolution of submission, for he has left on record the following declaration : " I never approved of that binding minute. I did not think it practical expediency to obey Mr. Wesley at three thousand miles' distance, in all matters relative to Church government." †

Having stricken out the resolution of obedience, the Conference saw that it would be well to send some solace. So Lee tells us : " We then wrote a long and loving letter to Mr. Wesley, and requested

* Snethen's *Reply to Mr. O'Kelly's Apology for Protesting Against the Methodist Episcopal Church Government*. Philadelphia, 1800. Atkinson's *Centennial History of Methodism*, pp. 60, 61.

† Letter in Atkinson's *Centennial Hist.*, p. 56.

him to come over to America and visit his spiritual children." * This was asking a great deal in those days of a man almost eighty-four years of age, and would be even in this day, with its rapid and more comfortable ocean steamers. The letter does not seem to have satisfied Wesley ; but though the incident was painful to Wesley there can be no doubt as to the ultimate benefit of this independence to American Methodism.

Two years later an effort was made to console Wesley by inserting his name in the Annual Minutes before the names of Coke and Asbury (Minutes of 1789), but the resolution of obedience never was restored.

The Rev. Thomas Morrell says :

Mr. Wesley complained that we were ungrateful. We felt ourselves grieved that the good old man was hurt, and determined to give him every satisfaction in our power consistent with our rights, and in 1789 the Conference consented that his name should be restored in the Minutes, in testimony of our union with and respect for him, but inserted in such a manner as to preclude him from exercising an unconstitutional power over us.†

This incident shows that Wesley did not consider that a superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal Church, even after he had been set apart with religious service, was any higher, or as high as himself, which would not have been the case had the superin-

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 127.

† Morrell's pamphlet, *Truth Discovered*.

tendent received an order higher than that of a presbyter.

It shows not only Presbyter Wesley's estimate of his authority as the head of Methodism, but also his opinion that a superintendent occupying the "episcopal office" could be removed from his position at his pleasure, and that without any cause, such as crime or improper conduct, being alleged; a view which cannot be harmonized with any notion of the superintendency as a higher order, but which would be compatible with his idea of the episcopate or superintendency as an office.

Asbury, in his letter to the Rev. Joseph Benson, which has been quoted, and which referred to this very matter, speaks of "the right of electing every Church *officer*, and more especially our superintendent," which shows that Asbury looked upon the superintendency as an office, and the superintendent as an officer; and his remark that Wesley's claim "meant to put him out of office" implies the same thing. In brief, the whole incident reveals the fact that the superintendent was regarded as having a higher office but not a higher order.

Another troublesome question in this Conference of 1787 was one raised in regard to Dr. Coke. Coke had been out of the country, and yet had undertaken to direct certain matters in the United States. The preachers thought that in so doing he had gone beyond his functions as a superintendent, and at this

Conference they boldly and vigorously expressed their dissatisfaction. Lee says :

At the Baltimore Conference the preachers complained of Dr. Coke, because he had taken upon himself a right which they never gave him, of altering the time and place of holding our Conferences, after it had been settled and fixed on at the previous Conference. Another complaint was brought against him for writing improper letters to some of our preachers, such as were calculated to stir up strife and contention among them.*

This shows that the Conference held that it was superior to the superintendents, and that at will it could take them to task. But this would be inconsistent if the superintendency were a special and higher clerical order rather than an office. That presbyters and preachers who had not attained that order should call a superintendent to account for official action shows that they looked upon his position as an office and not an order.

That they took a superintendent to task "because he had taken upon himself a right which they never gave him," shows not only that a superintendent had no right to do any thing that was not specified in the Discipline, but also that his position possessed no power excepting that which the General Conference expressly and explicitly gave; and this position is consistent only with the idea of an office and not a ministerial order. An order carries with itself certain prerogatives, but an office has no power excepting as the body creating the office delegates power to it.

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 124.

The action of this Conference shows that its members understood that the superintendency had no power excepting what the Conference pleased to give it, and, therefore, they must have viewed it as an office, and not as an order. The Conference was the fountain of power, the superintendency had no inherent prerogatives, and whatever functions the office possessed were merely delegated powers. Lee says :

At that time the doctor saw that the preachers were pretty generally united against him; he acknowledged his faults, begged pardon, and promised not to meddle with our affairs again, when he was out of the United States. He then gave in writing a certificate to the same purpose.*

The certificate which Superintendent Coke gave the Conference is as follows :

THE CERTIFICATE OF DR. COKE TO THE CONFERENCE.

I do solemnly engage, by this instrument, that I never will, by virtue of my office, as superintendent of the Methodist Church, during my absence from the United States of America, exercise any government whatever in the said Methodist Church during my absence from the United States. And I do also engage that I will exercise no privilege in the said Church when present in the United States except that of ordaining according to the regulations and law already existing, or hereafter to be made, in the said Church, and that of presiding when present in Conference, and, lastly, that of traveling at large.

Given under my hand the second day of May, in the year 1787.

THOMAS COKE.

Witnesses: JOHN TUNNIL,
JOHN HAGERTY,
NELSON REED.

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 125.

He saw that the Conference was jealous of its rights, and that it would not tolerate an episcopate administered from a foreign country, and hence he promised to refrain from exercising "any government whatever" in the Church during his absence from the United States.

The preachers then agreed to forgive what was past, provided this condition should be expressed in the Minutes, which was done thus :

Ques. Who are the superintendents of our Church for the United States? *Ans.* Thomas Coke (when present in the States) and Francis Asbury.*

And so it appears in the Annual Minutes for 1787

Thus this Conference asserted the right to limit a superintendent's jurisdiction and to limit the exercise of his functions even after he had been elected, and though for years he had occupied the "episcopal office."

This Conference declared Dr. Coke a superintendent only when in the United States—that when he went out of the United States he lost all power of superintendency—and, if he stayed out, he ceased to be a superintendent. This is practically a declaration that once a superintendent does not make a man a superintendent every-where, and that once a superintendent does not mean always a superintendent.

Superintendent Coke ceased being a superintendent when he went beyond the bounds of the United

* *Lee's History of the Methodists*, pp. 125, 126.

States, and then he had no power of superintendency over the very body that had recognized and elected him. Now, if the superintendency had been an order, Dr. Coke must have carried it with him every-where, for this is a peculiarity of the prerogative of order as contrasted with that of office. Thus no one ever heard of a man being ordained a presbyter and then the body that conferred or recognized the order saying he was a presbyter only when he was in one particular place. A clerical order is of that peculiar character that it cannot be so limited to a locality, but goes with him upon whom it has been conferred wherever he goes. Thus a presbyter is a presbyter always and every-where unless he be entirely deposed from the ministry. That they so limited the superintendency in the case of Coke shows that the Conference looked upon it as an office and not as an order. Again, one educated as Coke, knowing the rights of clerical orders, would not have yielded in such a way had the superintendency been an order. That he acquiesced in the arrangement is a confession that he understood the superintendency was not an order. That he considered it an office appears further from the fact that in his written agreement Coke uses the expression "by virtue of my *office*, as superintendent."

In this case the Conference declared itself superior to any of its offices and to all its officers, and so asserted its right and power to say where a superintendent should and where he should not exercise

jurisdiction—when he should and when he should not be superintendent. The power to limit in one place implies the power to limit in some other, and this kind of control implies that the superintendency is merely an office and not a ministerial order; for no Church gives a man a clerical order with the idea that he has that order only while he is in a particular locality.

We have already intimated that those who edited the Minutes probably inserted expressions by way of comment for which it would hardly be just to hold the Conference responsible. We have also seen that Asbury as early as November 27, 1785, was engaged in re-arranging the Discipline, and in his Journal, under date of March 25, 1786, he says: "Read our Form of Discipline in manuscript, which Brother Dickins has been preparing for the press." So it would seem that Asbury and John Dickins had been working together on this revision. The re-arranged Discipline, however, was not published until 1787, probably because Asbury desired to secure the concurrence of Coke, who returned to America that year. Lee says:

In the course of this year Mr. Asbury reprinted the General Minutes, but in a different form from what they were before. The title of this pamphlet was as follows: "A Form of Discipline for the Ministers, Preachers, and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America; considered and approved at a Conference held at Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, on Monday, the 27th day of December, 1784. In which the Reverend Thomas Coke, LL.D., and the Reverend Francis

Asbury presided. Arranged under proper heads, and methodized in a more acceptable and easy manner." *

There is no evidence that the Conference gave the editor or editors authority to re-arrange the Discipline, much less to make changes in the matter. Certainly the re-arrangement of the Discipline of 1787 was not adopted by the Conference in 1784, and it will be seen that one very important change was made without the previous authority of the Conference. Lee tells us that

In this Discipline there were thirty-one sections, and sixty-three questions, with answers to them all. The third question in the second section, and the answer, read thus:

Quest. Is there any other business to be done in Conference?

Ans. The electing and ordaining of bishops, elders, and deacons.

Lee, commenting upon this, says :

This was the first time that our superintendents ever gave themselves the title of bishops in the Minutes. They changed the title themselves, without the consent of the Conference; and at the next Conference they asked the preachers if the word *bishop* might stand in the *Minutes*, seeing that it was a Scripture name, and the meaning of the word bishop was the same with that of superintendent.

Some of the preachers opposed the alteration, and wished to retain the former title; but a majority of the preachers agreed to let the word *bishop* remain, and in the Annual Minutes for the next year the first question is, "Who are the bishops of our Church for the United States?" †

It is evident that this revised Discipline was not published until after the Conference of 1787 had ad-

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, pp. 127, 128. † *Ibid.*, p. 128.

journed, and after the Annual Minutes for 1787 had been issued, for these Minutes contain the title superintendent, and not the title bishop, and, as the last Conference of this year convened on the 24th of July, the Discipline did not appear until after that; and the consent of the Conference to the change of title could not have been given until 1788.*

It would appear, therefore, that nothing had been said to any of the Conferences about the proposed change until after the revised Discipline had been printed and circulated. In the meantime nearly a whole year passed before the Conference could meet, and the people had become somewhat accustomed to the change, and, though there was opposition to the new title, finally it was permitted to remain.

There can be no question that the superintendency was an episcopacy, and that superintendent and bishop might be considered as equivalent, for both had the idea of oversight;† but the editors committed an error which was akin to usurpation when they changed a title which had been adopted by the

* Both Bangs and Emory are mistaken as to some of their dates at this point.

† Superintendent, an overseer; from French *superintendant*, "a superintendent;" from Latin *superintendent*, stem of pres. part. of *superintendere*, to superintend: from Latin *super*, over, above; and *intendere*, to attend to, apply the mind; Latin *intendere*, to stretch out, bend, direct, apply the mind. *Intendant*, from Old French, one of "the four overseers or controllers of the exchequer, at first brought in by King Francis the First." (See Skeat's *Etymological Dict.*) So bishop, from *episcopos*, an overseer or overlooker.

Church, without first obtaining the consent of the Conference. Superintendent did mean bishop, and the superintendency was an episcopacy, but they had no right to make the change without authority. In judging of this action, however, it should be remembered that the superintendents had not yet gotten away from the influence of the example of Wesley, who held that his decision was supreme. Their use of a synonym was illegal, but by the action of the Conference of 1788 the name bishop became the legal title, and, as Lee says, "From this time the name of bishop has been in common use among us, both in conversation and in writing." *

Notwithstanding the change of name it was well understood there was no change in the thing, but that "the meaning of the word bishop was the same with that of superintendent." So the qualifying note which had been inserted in the Minutes helped to prevent mistakes on this point. It said :

As the translators of our version of the Bible have used the English word bishop instead of superintendent, it has been thought by us that it would appear more scriptural to adopt their term bishop.

The equivalent title, superintendent, still stands in some places in the Discipline, and since the legalization of the two titles the bishops have frequently referred to themselves as the general superintendents ; and down to the present day the bishops have not

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 129.

thought themselves disparaged by being called general superintendents, thus acknowledging that both titles mean the same thing.

Dr. Atkinson remarks that

It will be observed that the title bishop was not assumed by the superintendents until after the declaration of submission to Wesley was expunged in 1787 by the Conference at Baltimore."*

But it will be remembered that the editor of the Minutes of 1785 used the phrase "superintendent or bishop," and Dr. Coke, in the printed copy of his discourse delivered at the consecration of Asbury, used the words "our bishops, or superintendents (as we rather call them)."†

Mr. Wesley was greatly displeased when he learned that the American superintendents had taken the title of bishop, and expressed his dissatisfaction in the most emphatic manner. Probably because he supposed that Asbury had been the prime mover in the

* Atkinson's *Centennial History of American Methodism*, p. 92.

† In this sermon Coke answers the question, "What right have you to exercise the episcopal office?" and says: "To me the most manifest and clear. God has been pleased, by Mr. Wesley, to raise up in America and Europe a numerous society well known by the name of Methodists. The whole body have invariably esteemed *this man* as their chief pastor, under Christ, and we are fully persuaded he has a right to ordain. Besides, we have every qualification for an episcopal church which that of Alexandria possessed for two hundred years, our bishops, or superintendents (as we rather call them), having been elected by the suffrages of the whole body of our ministers through the continent, assembled in General Conference" (Tyerman's *Life of Wesley*, vol. iii, p. 437; *Zion's Herald*, Boston, 1884.)

matter, or because he considered him responsible on account of his official position, Wesley wrote Asbury a very sharp letter expressing his disapproval of the new title.* But though it was keen, it was the fatherly chiding of the man of eighty-five to the son of forty-three years of age.

It will be noticed, however, that Wesley's objection was not to the office but to the name, and he preferred

* The letter was written in London, September 20, 1788, and was published by the Rev. Henry Moore, who was with Wesley when he wrote it. In the letter he says: "There is, indeed, a wide difference between the relation wherein you stand to the Americans, and the relation wherein I stand to *all* the Methodists. You are the elder brother of the American Methodists; I am, under God, the father of the whole family. Therefore I naturally care for you all in a manner no other person can do. Therefore I in a measure provide for you all; for the supplies which Dr. Coke provides for you he could not provide were it not for me—were it not that I not only permit him to collect, but support him in so doing.

"But in one point, my dear brother, I am a little afraid both the doctor and you differ from me. I study to be *little*, you study to be *great*; I *creep*, you *strut* along; I found a school, you a *college*. Nay, and call it after your own names. O beware! Do not seek to be *something*! Let me be nothing, and Christ be all in all.

"One instance of this, of your greatness, has given me great concern. How can you, how dare you, suffer yourself to be called a bishop? I shudder, I start at the very thought. Men may call me a *knave*, or a *fool*, a *rascal*, a *scoundrel*, and I am content, but they shall never, by my consent, call me a *bishop*! For my sake, for God's sake, for Christ's sake, put a full end to this. Let the Presbyterians do what they please, but let the Methodists know their calling better.

"Thus, my dear Franky, I have told you all that is in my heart; and let this, when I am no more seen, bear witness how sincerely I am your affectionate friend and brother,

JOHN WESLEY."

—Wesley's Works, English Edition, vol. xiii, p. 70.

the name superintendent, probably, because he thought it would more readily avoid the danger of the prelatial notions attached to the word bishop.

The Rev. Richard Watson, referring to Wesley's objection to the change, says :

The only objection he could have to the name was that from long association it was likely to convey a meaning beyond his own intention. But this was a matter of mere prudential feeling confined to himself; so that neither are Dr. Coke and Mr. Asbury to be blamed for using that appellation (bishop) in Mr. Wesley's sense, which was the same as presbyter as far as order was concerned, nor the American societies (as they have sometimes inconsiderately been) for calling themselves, in the same view, "The American Methodist Episcopal Church," since their episcopacy is founded upon the principle of bishops and presbyters being of the same *degree*—a more extended *office* only being assigned to the former, as in the primitive Church.*

While Wesley would not allow others to address him as bishop, nevertheless he said he was a bishop, and claimed that he was "a scriptural *ἐπίσκοπος*, as much as any man in England, or in Europe." His objection, therefore, was not to the thing but to the name.

Though the name was changed, the office remained the same. It was a true episcopate and, consequently, the incumbents of the office were bishops, and the Conference had power, regardless of Mr. Wesley, to use the word which was the equivalent of superintendent. The authority was not with Mr. Wesley, but with the Conference.

* Watson's *Life of Wesley*, American edition, p. 247.

In this new form of Discipline, issued in 1787, there was another change of some importance. The old question 3 and its answer were stricken out, and an introduction to the Discipline was inserted in their place. The former referred to the reason for the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the latter refers to the same thing, but gives other and more elaborate reasons.

The introduction is as follows :

We are thoroughly convinced that the Church of England, to which we have been united, is deficient in several of the most important parts of Christian discipline, and that (a few ministers and members excepted) it has lost the life and power of religion. We are not ignorant of the spirit and design it has ever discovered in Europe, of rising to pre-eminence and worldly dignities by virtue of a national establishment, and by the most servile devotion to the will of temporal governors ; and we fear the same spirit will lead the same Church in these United States (though altered in its name) to similar designs and attempts, if the number and strength of its members will ever afford a probability of success, and particularly to obtain a national establishment, which we cordially abhor as the great bane of truth and holiness, and consequently the greatest impediment in the world to the progress of vital Christianity.

For these reasons we have thought it our duty to form ourselves into an independent Church. And as the most excellent mode of Church government, according to our maturest judgment, is that of a moderate episcopacy, and as we are persuaded that the uninterrupted succession of bishops from the apostles can be proved neither from Scripture nor antiquity, we therefore have constituted ourselves into an Episcopal Church, under the direction of bishops, elders, deacons, and preachers, according to the forms of ordination annexed to

our Prayer Book, and the regulations laid down in this Form of Discipline.*

There appears to be no evidence that this was adopted by the Conference, but, like the change of name of the chief officers of the Church, was apparently the work of the editors. It is valuable, however, in showing, first, that they rejected the doctrine of apostolic succession, and that the kind of episcopacy they had was a "moderate episcopacy," and, in the light of the contrasts they draw, the legitimate inference must be that what they called their "moderate episcopacy" rejected all higher order notions.

In 1789 this introduction was stricken out, and another, in the form of question and answer, was inserted. This again was in its details probably editorial work. Perhaps because it was merely an introduction rather than a material part of the Discipline it was not deemed necessary to have Conference action on the language. At least there does not appear to be any evidence that the Conference voted upon the exact wording.

The object of this introduction was to declare the origin of the episcopate of American Methodism. It is as follows :

Quest. 1. What is the proper origin of the Episcopal authority in our Church ?

2. *Ans.* In the year 1784 the Rev. John Wesley, who, under God, had been the father of the great revival of religion now

* Emory on the Discipline, p. 93 ; Sherman on Discipline, p. 100.

extending over the earth by the means of the Methodists, determined to ordain ministers for America, and for this purpose sent over three regularly ordained clergy: but, preferring the episcopal mode of Church government to any other, he solemnly set apart, by the imposition of his hands and prayer, one of them, namely, Thomas Coke, Doctor of Civil Law, late of Jesus College, in the University of Oxford, for the episcopal office, and, having delivered to him letters of episcopal orders, commissioned and directed him to set apart Francis Asbury, then general assistant of the Methodist Society in America, for the same episcopal office; he, the said Francis Asbury, being first ordained deacon and elder. In consequence of which the said Francis Asbury was solemnly set apart for the said episcopal office by prayer, and the imposition of the hands of the said Thomas Coke, other regularly ordained ministers assisting in the sacred ceremony, at which time the General Conference, held at Baltimore, did unanimously receive the said Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury as their bishops, being fully satisfied of the validity of their episcopal ordination. *

The answer states that they trace the origin of the episcopal authority to the Rev. John Wesley, "the father" of Methodism, who had sent to America "three regularly ordained clergy," so that, even in a churchly sense, Methodist ordinations would not be irregular, but would have a "proper origin." It further states that Mr. Wesley had "solemnly set apart" one of them, namely, Dr. Coke, "for the episcopal office."

It will be noticed here and throughout this paragraph that the position or work is not called an order, but "the episcopal office," which phrase occurs no less than three times, apparently for the purpose of showing that they regarded the bishopric as an office.

* Emory on Discipline, p. 93; Sherman on Discipline, p. 101.

It is to be observed, further, that the source of their episcopacy, to which they point, is presbyterial. No one of any higher order than that of a presbyter takes part. Wesley is a presbyter, and so is each one who assists him in setting apart Dr. Coke to "the episcopal office," and the American Methodists declare they are "fully satisfied with the validity" of this procedure by presbyters. No one ordained to any higher order than that of a presbyter took part, and, consequently, according to higher order ideas, no higher order was conferred.

Dr. Coke could not have been admitted to any higher order, though he was set apart for the work of an office, for Wesley, who set him apart, affirmed that there was no higher order than that of presbyter. So Superintendent Coke remained a presbyter, and, as this paragraph states, Wesley "commissioned and directed him to set apart Francis Asbury" "for the same episcopal office."

The point they have in view is to trace the episcopate to Mr. Wesley, but, while this is correct, it is also true that the Conference formally adopted the episcopate, and unanimously elected the superintendents.

It will be noticed, also, that in this paragraph a distinction is made between an ordination and the service inducting one into the bishopric. Of Asbury it is said that he was "ordained deacon and elder." It is not said, however, that he was "ordained" superintendent or bishop, but that he was "*set apart* for the

said episcopal office," which reveals an incidental recognition of a difference between ordaining one a presbyter and setting apart a presbyter for the "episcopal office."

The phrase "letters of episcopal orders" must be taken in a qualified sense. It certainly cannot be understood as meaning that Wesley gave any certificate of an episcopacy having a higher order than that possessed by a presbyter, for he affirmed that there was no such distinct and higher order. It has also been clearly shown that the Methodist Episcopal Church could not have supposed that Coke had received any order above that of presbyter, for they had Wesley's declaration that there was no higher order. No doubtful phraseology can neutralize these positive facts.

Again, the phrase cannot be construed according to higher order notions, for that would make the writer of the paragraph guilty of falsification in asserting that which was contrary to the facts; for the fact is that Wesley never did give any letter certifying to a higher order than that of a presbyter, or in which he called the episcopate an order at all. The form in the testimonial letter is merely this: "I have this day set apart as a superintendent," etc. Thus the letter itself shows that it is not in any higher order sense "letters of episcopal orders," but simply a testimonial letter given by Wesley in which he certifies that Coke was "set apart" as a superintendent.

So the careless or doubtful use of the word "ordi-

nation" at the close of the introduction is to be construed in the same way. No order was given in the elevation to the episcopate, and therefore in the strict sense no "episcopal ordination," as meaning the conferring of an order above that of presbyter, took place. Wesley could not mean it when he held there was no higher order, and the American Conference could not mean it when it accepted Wesley's view.

The whole point in the mind of the writer of the paragraph was to show the "origin of the episcopal *authority*." The question before him was not whether the episcopate was a higher order, but whence it was derived. Having stated the source of the authority as he understood it, he did not appear to notice side issues that might arise.

That the service used in setting apart the bishops did not carry with it a clerical order will more clearly appear as we advance in the investigation.

This very year, 1789, Wesley's name was restored to the Minutes, and the intention in this restoration, and in the reference to him in the introductory paragraph just considered, seems to have been to honor the founder of Methodism, and perhaps to atone in a measure for the acts which had displeased him.

Bishop Coke, in his Journal, says:

On the 9th of March we began our Conference in Georgia. Here we agreed (as we have ever since, in each of the Conferences) that Mr. Wesley's name should be inserted at the head of our small Annual Minutes, and also in the Form of Disci-

pline; in the small Minutes as the fountain of our episcopal office, and in the Form of Discipline as the father of the whole work, under the divine guidance. To this all the Conferences have cheerfully and unanimously agreed.

It does not follow, however, that the Conferences passed upon the exact phraseology, but rather that they agreed to the restoration of the name, and that the editors subsequently did the phrasing. But it will be seen from the extract from Bishop Coke's Journal that he looked upon the bishopric merely as an office, and so he speaks of "our episcopal office." Lee remarks :

As some persons had complained of our receding from a former engagement made by some of our preachers, that "during the life of Mr. Wesley, in matters belonging to Church government they would obey his commands," and as others had thought that we did not pay as much respect to Mr. Wesley as we ought, the bishops introduced a question in the Annual Minutes which was as follows:

Ques. Who are the persons that exercise the episcopal office in the Methodist Church in Europe and America?

Ans. John Wesley, Thomas Coke, and Francis Asbury, by regular order and succession.

The next question was asked differently from what it had ever been in any of the former Minutes, which stand thus:

Ques. Who have been elected by the unanimous suffrages of the General Conference, to superintend the Methodist connection in America?

Ans. Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury.*

The Minutes, however, do not contain the words, "by regular order and succession,"† and the Minutes for 1790 substitute the words, "Methodist Episcopal

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 142.

† Minutes for 1789.

Church in America," for "Methodist Connection in America."*

Here they call the episcopate an office, and as the very first in episcopal authority they name John Wesley. Now, Wesley was in order a presbyter and nothing more, and in the testimonial he gave Coke he calls himself "a presbyter of the Church of England."

These early Methodists could not have understood the episcopate to be an order higher than the eldership, or they would not have placed or recognized a presbyter in that position who though in it remained a presbyter. Yet here they recognize Presbyter Wesley as in the "episcopal office," and place his name before the names of Bishop Coke and Bishop Asbury.

Further, it is evident that they laid no stress upon the service used in setting apart the bishops, and that they did not consider that it carried with it any higher order, for they recognized Wesley, who had never been set apart for the episcopate by any "sacred ceremony," and who had never received any ordination above that of the eldership, as not only the equal but the superior of Coke and Asbury, who had been specially set apart with religious service. The service, therefore, was not considered as having any virtue, or as giving any higher order, but must have been looked upon as a non-essential but appropriate ceremony which left the presbyter to whom it was applied still a presbyter, and, as to orders, nothing

* Minutes for 1790.

more. With them a bishop was a presbyter in authority over presbyters, but in order on an equality, and, if the presbyter exercised such power, he was a true *episcopos*, whether he had or had not been subject to a special setting apart, and whether he had or had not been formally elected to that position, for Wesley had neither been formally elected nor formally set apart; and, so, their understanding must have been that their bishopric was not an order, but an office of oversight occupied by a presbyter.

This single fact, that, in the very year the aforementioned paragraph was introduced, Mr. Wesley was recognized as the chief *episcopos* of Methodism, relieves any obscure expression it may contain, and dissipates any doubt such an expression might create; so that "letters of episcopal orders" cannot be understood as implying any higher order than that of presbyter, for no higher order was recognized.

At the Conference of 1792 occurred a secession led by the Rev. James O'Kelly, and, a few months before, another independent movement had been started by the Rev. William Hammett. Both of these leaders were men of decided ability, and for a time met with considerable success.

Though O'Kelly and his followers did not withdraw on account of the nature of the episcopacy, nevertheless, once they had withdrawn, they began to speak of it as a "spurious episcopacy." *

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 205.

Lee says of the seceders :

The name of bishop they abhorred. They acknowledged that the word *bishop* and the word *elder* in the Scriptures *meant the same thing* ; yet they showed great indignation against the word bishop, and were well pleased with the word elder. In this case they showed their weakness, or their wickedness, in condemning a word which in substance they approved of.*

This incidental allusion by Lee shows that at that day the Methodists understood the words bishop and elder to mean the same order.

One who defended the Church against this antagonism was the Rev. John Dickins, the first American preacher to whom Coke imparted the plan for the new organization. He was a member of the Christmas Conference, and consequently knew the original intention, as well as the understanding, at the time he wrote.

Emory, in his *Defense of Our Fathers*, quotes from a pamphlet written by Dickins in 1792, and says :

The late Rev. John Dickins, in his remarks on the proceedings of Mr. Hammett, says, in relation to the superiority of our bishops, as not derived from their "separate ordination," but from the suffrages of the body of ministers: "Pray, when was it otherwise?" and, "How can the Conference have power to remove Mr. Asbury and ordain another to fill his place, if they see it necessary, on any other ground?" Mr. Hammett had said: "Let your superintendents know, therefore, that their superiority is derived from your suffrages, and not by virtue of a separate ordination. Gain and establish this point, and you sap the foundation of all arbitrary power in your Church for-

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 204.

ever." Mr. Dickins replies : "Now, who ever said the superiority of the bishops was by virtue of a separate ordination ? If this gave them their superiority, how came they to be removable by the Conference ? If, then, what you there plead for will sap the foundation of all arbitrary power, it has been sapped in our Connection from the first establishment of our constitution " (p. 31). Again he remarks (p. 32): " We all know Mr. Asbury derived his official power from the Conference, and therefore his *office* is at their disposal."

"Mr. Asbury," he says in another place, " was thus chosen by the Conference, both before and after he was ordained a bishop; and he is still considered as the person of their choice, by being responsible to the Conference, who have power to remove him, and fill his place with another; if they see it necessary. And as he is liable every year to be removed, he may be considered as their annual choice " (p. 15).*

This father of the Church calls the episcopate an office. He states that the bishops have no superiority "by virtue of a separate ordination," and it follows, therefore, that if the so-called "ordination" gave no superiority it gave no higher order. He declares that the bishop "derived his official power from the Conference," and that the "separate ordination" had nothing to do with his superiority, and that there is not "any other ground" on which the Conference has "power to remove" a bishop, and "fill his place, if they see it necessary," with another. Finally, he affirms that this view, that there is no virtue in the "separate ordination," and that the bishop derives his superiority solely "from the suffrages of the body of ministers," has been held

* Emory's *Defense of Our Fathers*, pp. 109, 110.

“from the first establishment of our constitution,” and he boldly asks, “Who ever said the superiority of the bishops was by virtue of a separate ordination?”

With Dickins, and those for whom he spoke, the bishopric was an office, and therefore the election was every thing, while the service of setting apart, whatever it might be called, was a fitting formality that added nothing to the man or the position, and hence, though appropriate, it gave no order. Bishop Emory, commenting on this quotation from Dickins, says :

The high standing of John Dickins is too well known to need any statement of it here. He was also the particular and most intimate friend of Bishop Asbury. And the pamphlet containing the above sentiments was published by the unanimous request of the Conference held at Philadelphia, Sept. 5, 1792; and may be therefore considered as expressing the views both of that Conference and of Bishop Asbury in relation to the true and original character of Methodist Episcopacy.” *

The Discipline issued in 1792 had a significant change in the heading of the section on “Bishops and their Duty.” In 1787 it read : “On the Constituting of Bishops and their Duty.” In 1792 this was changed to “The Election and *Consecration* of Bishops and their Duty.” † The use of the word consecration was evidently intended to make a distinction between the service used in setting apart bishops and the services used at the ordination of deacons and

* Emory's *Defense*, p. 110.

† Sherman on Discipline, p. 164.

elders, the word consecration conveying the idea of setting apart for an office, and not the conferring of an order.

The Discipline of 1796 is distinguished from all others by containing notes on the respective sections prepared by the bishops.*

These consisted partly of Scripture proofs of the doctrine and rules of the Church, and partly of expositions of the Discipline. The bishops themselves disclaimed having any authority "to make laws or regulations," much less that their notes be regarded in that light, now that the Discipline has been considerably modified. But they are still interesting and important, as containing the views of the first bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church respecting its discipline at that time, and also as having been prepared at the request of the General Conference of 1796, and having received the implied sanction of the General Conference of 1800, which directed that they should be printed in such a manner that they could be conveniently bound up with the Form of Discipline. †

In these notes on the Discipline, Bishops Coke and Asbury appear to have taken particular pains to indicate that the service setting apart a bishop was not an ordination in the sense that it conferred an order. Hence they use the word *consecration* in contradistinction to ordination. Thus they say that Mr. Wes-

* Emory on the Discipline, 1851, pp. 84, 85.

† Emory on Discipline, 1843, p. 281. The action of the General Conference of 1800 was: "Resolved, That the Form of Discipline shall be printed by itself, and the notes likewise printed distinctly out, with such references that they may be bound with the Form, and that the preachers shall have liberty to order as many as they please, with the notes or without them" (General Conference Journal, 1800, pp. 43, 44).

ley "first *consecrated* one for the office of a bishop." Again, they say Mr. Wesley "*consecrated* two bishops, Thomas Coke and Alex. Mather, one before the present episcopal plan took place in America, and the other afterward, besides *ordaining* elders and deacons."

Then this section has the heading, "The Election and Consecration of Bishops," while other sections have "The Election and Ordination of Traveling Elders," and "The Election and Ordination of Traveling Deacons," just as they appeared in the Discipline itself. Thus both the bishops and the Discipline set forth by contrast the distinction in the nature of the services, that, while the services for deacons and elders imply "ordering," the service for the bishop does not imply the conferring of an order, but the formal setting apart for that which they term an office. Therefore the word *ordain* is used for elders and deacons, who were recognized as receiving orders, and *consecrate* for one who entered the bishopric, which, by way of distinction, was regarded as an office.

Bishops Coke and Asbury also reveal the same relation when they refer to the supreme power which the General Conference possessed over the incumbents of the "episcopal office." They state that

They are *perfectly subject* to the General Conference, they are perfectly dependent; that their power, their usefulness, themselves, are entirely at the mercy of the General Conference, and, on the charge of immorality, at the mercy of two thirds of the little Conference of nine.

Again they say :

The authority given to, or rather declared to exist in, the General Conference, that in case there shall be no bishop remaining in the Church they shall elect a bishop and authorize the elders to *consecrate* him, will not admit of an objection, except on the supposition that the fable of an uninterrupted apostolic succession be allowed to be true. St. Jerome, who was as strong an advocate for episcopacy as perhaps any in the primitive Church, informs us, that in the church of Alexandria (which was, in ancient times, one of the most respectable of the churches) the college of presbyters not only elected a bishop on the decease of the former, but *consecrated* him by the imposition of their own hands *solely*, from the time of St. Mark, their first bishop, to the time of Dionysius, which was a space of about two hundred years; and the college of presbyters in ancient times answered to our General Conference.*

The bishops in their notes also group the episcopate with "the presiding elder's office," and ask, "Is it not strange that any of *the people* should complain of *this* or of the *episcopal* office?" and go on to speak of them as "these offices," so that with them the bishopric was an office in the sense that the presiding eldership was an office, though superior. Now, no one pretends that the presiding eldership is an order, and according to Coke and Asbury's grouping neither is the bishopric. So, having a service of installation for presiding elders would not make the office an order, and neither would any definite or indefinite extension of the term. The character-

* Coke and Asbury's Notes on Discipline, chapter i, section 4. See Emory and Sherman on Discipline.

istic of both is official authority mainly of an executive nature, and so they are fitly grouped together as offices.

At the General Conference of 1796 it was proposed, on account of Asbury's ill health and Coke's frequent absences, to elect another bishop. This was agreed to, but "after the vote was taken a difficulty arose about the manner of choosing or electing" the bishop, "and before the point was settled Dr. Coke begged that the business might be laid over until the afternoon, which was done." Lee then says:

When we met in the afternoon the doctor offered himself to us, if we saw cause to take him ; and promised to serve us in the best manner he could, and to be entirely at the disposal of his American brethren, and to live and die among them.*

The Rev. John Kobler, who was a member of the Conference, says :

This unexpected offer, and to many an unwelcome one, opened the way to a large and spirited debate. A number present were warmly in favor of accepting the offer, and as many were against it. Mr. Lee was decidedly against and he warmly opposed it. He could not endure the absolute spirit and overbearing disposition of Dr. Coke, as a high officer in the Church. Mr. Lee was a candid man, and in no wise disposed to give flattering titles to any, and, as such, he opposed the offer with great zeal and eloquence from first to last. He was a man of great penetration, and could see through circumstances and read men well. He was the best speaker in the Conference. He first showed that there were several members in our Connection who were well qualified

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, pp. 247, 248.

to fill the office, having been long and well proved; who were natives of the country, one of ourselves, and were well acquainted with the rules by which our civil and religious privileges were regulated. But his most powerful argument, I well remember, was this: "That the doctor was a thoroughbred Englishman; and an entire stranger abroad in the country (*out of the Church*); that the deep-rooted prejudices against British oppression, which by our arduous Revolutionary struggle we had so recently thrown off, still hung heavily, and was operating powerfully upon the public mind; and that to select a high officer to govern our Church from that distant and tyrannizing nation, whose spirit and practice were held in abhorrence by the American people, would, in his judgment, be a very impolitic step, and would tend to raise the suspicions and prejudices of the public against us as a Church. He further said he had frequently heard the same objections made against us as an American church for having a native of England (Bishop Asbury) at our head; and now to add another, who, in many respects, had not the experience, prudence, nor skill in government that Bishop Asbury had, would operate very materially against the best interests of the Church."

The debate lasted two days, and was incessant, and during the time the doctor was secluded from the Conference room. Mr. Lee and his party evidently had the better of the cause in debate, and were gaining confidence continually. When Bishop Asbury saw how the matter was likely to go, he rose from the chair, and with much apparent feeling said: "If we reject him it will be his ruin, for the British Conference will certainly know of it, and it will sink him vastly in their estimation." Here the debate ended. I well remember during the debate the doctor came into the Conference and made a speech. Among other things, he said "he never was cast upon such a sea of uncertainty before."*

* Letter of John Kobler in *Life and Times of Rev. Jesse Lee*, by Dr. Leroy M. Lee, pp. 327, 328.

Lee says :

The Conference at length agreed to the doctor's proposal, and concluded that if the doctor tarried with us we could do with two bishops. The doctor then gave us the following instrument in writing :

" I offer myself to my American brethren entirely to their service, all I am and have, with my talents and labors in every respect; without any mental reservation whatsoever, to labor among them, and to *assist* Bishop Asbury; *not to station the preachers at any time when he is present*, but to exercise all episcopal duties, when I hold a Conference in his absence, *and by his consent*, and to visit the West Indies and France when there is an opening, and I can be spared.

" Signed,

THOMAS COKE.

" Conference Room, Baltimore, October 27, 1796." *

It will be observed that Coke, who was the first superintendent or bishop, is thus reduced or reduces himself to the position of an assistant, and that the Conference claimed complete control over him. Such control of a bishop which the Conference claimed, and which both Asbury and Coke conceded, is not at all in harmony with the idea that the bishopric is a higher order, but is with the idea that it is an executive office.

In the year 1800 Mr. Asbury " proposed to *resign* his *office* as superintendent " and " take his seat in the Conference on a *level with the elders*," but the Conference took formal action on " his intention of *resigning his official station*," and requested " a con-

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 248; Bangs's *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. ii, p. 56.

tinuation of his services as one of the general superintendents." Lee says:

Some time previous to the meeting of the preachers in that Conference Mr. Asbury had said that when they met he would *resign his office* as superintendent of the Methodist Connection, and would take his seat in the Conference on a *level with the elders*. He wrote to several of the preachers in different parts of the Connection, and informed them of his intention; and engaged other preachers to write to their brethren in the ministry, and to inform them of his intention to resign. Withal, he wrote his resignation with an intention to deliver it into the Conference as soon as they met, and to have it read in their first meeting. He said he was so weak and feeble both in body and mind that he was not able to go through the fatigues of his *office*.*

At the Conference Bishop Asbury "intimated that he did not know whether this General Conference were satisfied with his former services."†

When Conference met and proceeded to business they first took up Mr. Asbury's case thus:

Quest. Whereas, Mr. Asbury has signified his intention of *resigning his official station* in our Church on account of his weakness of body, what is the sense of the Conference on this occasion?

Ans. 1. The General Conference consider themselves under many and great obligations to Mr. Asbury for the many and great services which he has rendered to this Connection.

2. This Conference do earnestly entreat Mr. Asbury for a continuation of his services as one of the general superintendents of the Methodist Episcopal Church, as far as his strength will permit.‡

* Lee's *History of the Methodists*, p. 265; General Conference Journal, 1800, p. 33.

† *Ibid.*

‡ *Ibid.*

This item of history reveals a number of important facts: 1. That the word bishop is not used, but the title *general superintendent*, showing that the latter was equivalent and equally honorable; 2. That Lee, Asbury, and the Conference understood the episcopate or superintendency to be an “*office*” or an “*official station*”; 3. That Asbury and the Conference considered that a bishop could resign; and 4. That Asbury considered that when a bishop or superintendent “resigned his office” he would then be “on a level with the elders,” that is to say, he had no separate order from which to resign, and when divested of his office he was merely an elder; or, in other words, that when a bishop resigned “his official station” he resigned all that he had above that which the ordinary elders possessed. He was a bishop as to office, but as to order merely an elder.

“The next question which arose was, whether Dr. Coke, who was present as one of the presidents of the Conference, might have liberty to return to Europe in conformity to an earnest request of the British Conference to that effect. This request was founded on the acknowledged right which the American Conference had to the exclusive services of Dr. Coke, in consequence of the solemn pledge he had given them in the year 1796, and which had been gratefully accepted by the American Conference. And so sacred was this obligation considered by Dr. Coke, and recognized by the British Conference, that he would not

consent to a withdrawal of his services from his American brethren without their approbation and consent. When, however, this engagement was first made known to the brethren in Great Britain, they expressed their deep regrets that the doctor had thus deprived them of his valuable services, particularly in the missionary department of their work. Accordingly, when he visited the Continent in 1797, he brought with him an earnest and affectionate address from the British Conference to their American brethren, in which they urged the doctor's return to Europe with all practicable speed." *

No General Conference was in session, and hence there was no authority to speak for the whole body, but the matter was submitted to the Virginia Conference, and the reply which Asbury sent to the English Conference throws light upon the relative powers of the General Conference. Bishop Asbury thus replied:

RESPECTED FATHERS AND BRETHREN: You, in your brotherly kindness, were pleased to address a letter to us, your brethren and friends in America, expressing your difficulties and desires concerning our beloved brother Dr. Coke, that he might return to Europe to heal the breach which designing men have been making among you, or prevent its threatened overthrow. We have but one grand responsive body, which is our General Conference, and it was in this body the doctor entered his obligations to serve his brethren in America. No

* Bangs's *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. ii, pp. 88, 89.

yearly Conference, no official character, dare assume to answer for that grand federal body.

By the advice of the yearly Conference now sitting in Virginia, and the respect I bear to you, I write to inform you that in our own persons and order we consent to his return and *partial* continuance with you, and earnestly pray that you may have peace, union, and happiness together.*

This shows that the relative powers of bishop, yearly Conference, and General Conference were becoming more clearly defined.

The General Conference of 1800, after deliberating on the request, adopted the following resolution :

That in compliance with the address of the British Conference to let Dr. Coke return to Europe, this General Conference consent to his return upon condition that he come back to America as soon as his business will allow, but certainly by the next General Conference.

The Journal of the General Conference says : “ A large majority arose in favor of it.” †

It was decided at this General Conference to elect another bishop, and the question arose as to “ whether he shall be equal to Bishop Asbury or subordinate to him,” ‡ and the Conference decided :

That the bishops shall have full and equal jurisdiction in all and every respect whatsoever. That each and every bishop shall attend each and every Conference, and then and there mutually preside and station the preachers; *provided*, that, in case they should unavoidably be prevented from all attending, the bishop or bishops then present shall be competent to dis-

* Bangs's *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. ii, pp. 89, 90.

† General Conference Journal, 1800, pp. 32-34.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

charge the duties of the office as fully and effectually, in every respect, as if they were all present.*

On Monday morning, May 12, the Conference proceeded to the election of a bishop. The first ballot was a tie, and was supposed to be defective. Upon the second ballot there were fifty-nine votes for the Rev. Richard Whatcoat, and fifty-five for the Rev. Jesse Lee, and Whatcoat was declared duly elected.†

Accordingly, on the 18th of May he was consecrated as a joint superintendent with Bishop Asbury, by prayer and imposition of hands of Bishops Coke and Asbury, assisted by some of the elders.‡

The General Conference of 1804, at which Bishop Coke was present, showed marked improvement in its modes of procedure, and the methodical spirit of Bishop Coke was very manifest.

On the motion of the Rev. Ezekiel Cooper it was resolved that

Dr. Coke shall have leave from this General Conference to return to Europe, agreeably to the request of the European Conferences, *provided*, he shall hold himself subject to the call of three of our Annual Conferences to return to us when he shall be requested; but at furthest that he shall return, if he lives, to the next General Conference.§

All this action in reference to Bishop Coke was an assertion of power, not as dealing with an order, but as controlling an officer.

* General Conference Journal, 1800, p. 36. † *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 37.

‡ Bangs's *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 93.

§ *General Conference Journal*, 1804, p. 64.

The General Conference of 1808 decided that future General Conferences should not be composed of preachers of four years' standing, but that the General Conference should be a delegated body.

Up to this time the General Conference had supreme power, but it was now necessary to put some limitations on the power of the General Conference, which would be composed of delegates representing the body of the ministry. It was therefore resolved that "The General Conference shall have full powers to make rules and regulations for our Church under the following limitations and restrictions," and one of these restrictions was: "They shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government, so as to do away episcopacy or destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency;" and then they further provided that that which the General Conference was restricted from doing itself could be done "upon the joint recommendation of all the Annual Conferences, then a majority of two thirds of the General Conference succeeding." *

This shows that the General Conferences, prior to the adoption of the order for a delegated General Conference, had power to destroy the episcopacy or

* General Conference Journal, 1808, p. 89.

In 1832 the *proviso* was amended, and the form as it now stands in the Discipline was adopted. The amended form permits the change to be made on the vote of three fourths of the members of the Annual Conferences, and allows the matter to originate in the General Conference.

the plan of the itinerant general superintendency, and that after that regulation the General and Annual Conferences, acting concurrently, still had that power, which shows that they were dealing with an official position.*

Bishop Coke was not present at the General Conference of 1808, but he wrote to that body, giving reasons for his absence, and making certain propositions as a condition for his return to episcopal duty in America. Referring to his visit to America four years before, he said :

I did not take a decisive farewell of my brethren in Europe, as I was not sure whether you would, in your circumstances, as they respected Bishop Asbury, receive me as an *efficient* superintendent or bishop among you *in any degree or manner*.†

He now wants them to define what powers he would have should he return to America, which was

* "The constitution gives to the General Conference *full powers* to make rules and regulations under defined limitations—power to make *all* rules and regulations pertinent to Church government under *specified* restrictions, and under no other restrictions. There is not here a delegation of enumerated powers accompanied by a general reservation, as in the case of the federal government, but a delegation of general and sweeping powers under enumerated and well-defined restrictions. The whole power to rule and regulate the Church is given to the General Conference by the plain terms of the grant, and it is to be held as restricted only in those particulars in which it was designed not to delegate the power. In what particulars it was designed not to delegate the power must be determined by the terms of the constitution. No limitations can be implied other than those assigned in the instrument itself." (Bishop W. L. Harris on *The Constitutional Powers of the General Conference*, 1860, pp. 22, 23.)

† The italics are his own.

an admission of the complete power of the Conference over his position, not as it would have over an order, but as it would over an office.

He wants to have "a-full right" to give his judgment "in every thing, in the General and Annual Conferences," etc., and adds :


If this cannot at present be granted *by the authority of the General Conference*, you may insert me in your Minutes as formerly ; or you may insert the resident bishop or bishops, and add a N. B., Dr. Coke (or Bishop Coke, as you please) resides in Europe till he be called to the States by the General Conference or by the Annual Conferences ; or, if this be not agreeable, you must *expel* me (for dropping me out of your public Minutes will be, to all intents and purposes, an expulsion).*

"It was agreed that Dr. Coke's name be printed in the N. B. in the annual Minutes of the present year." †

The way it did appear is as follows :

Quest. 6. Who are the superintendents and bishops ?

Ans. Francis Asbury, William McKendree.

 Dr. Coke, at the request of the British Conference, and by consent of our General Conference, resides in Europe ; he is not to exercise the office of superintendent among us in the United States until he be recalled by the General Conference, or by all of the Annual Conferences respectively. ‡

Thus they dealt with one to whom the Methodist Episcopal Church is greatly indebted for many of its best features, and of whom Bishop Asbury said :

* Bangs's *History of Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. ii, pp. 197-199.

† General Conference Journal, 1808, p. 79.

‡ Minutes for 1808.

“Doctor Coke—of blessed mind and soul—of the third branch of the Oxonian Methodists—a gentleman, a scholar, and a bishop, to us—and as a minister of Christ, in zeal, in labors, and in services, the greatest man of the last century.”* Such was the control the Conference had over the office and the officer. They did not act so because they did not honor the man, but because they deemed the action was required by the circumstances.

An editorial in *The Christian Advocate* of 1844, presumably by the celebrated Dr. Bond, says:

It is manifest that the General Conference of 1808 had no doubt as to its right to suspend Dr. Coke, one of their bishops, during their pleasure; for the resolution does not only forbid him to exercise the functions of a superintendent over the Methodist Episcopal Church while he continued to reside in Europe, but until *recalled*. He might have come to America at any time; but he could not reinstate himself in the episcopate, without he should be again called to it, either by vote of the General Conference or by all the Annual Conferences. Nor did the Conference proceed by impeachment, or upon any specific charge of immorality or violation of Discipline. The action of the body was simply prudential. The action of the Conference was, to all intents and purposes, a deposition of the bishop, though it was so expressed as to give him as little offense as possible.

The same authority remarks that the Discipline, as acted upon by the General Conference, established the right of the General Conference to depose or suspend a general superintendent for any cause which that body may believe ren-

* Asbury's Journal, vol. iii, p. 380.

ders that deposition or suspension necessary, without the process of trial or impeachment.*

The action of the General Conference was consistent only with the supposition that the bishopric was not an order but an office, and shows that the Church at that day regarded and treated it simply as an official position. So Bishop Coke viewed it, and, as Watson says, when he was in America, he was, "in the sense of *office*," a bishop, yet when he returned to England, where "he had no such office," "he used no such title and made no such pretension."†

In another letter, addressed to the General Conference of 1808, Dr. Coke explains his letter to Bishop White of the Protestant Episcopal Church. The letter to Bishop White had been interpreted not only as an application for union with the Protestant Episcopal Church, but also for "episcopal ordination" from that body for himself and Asbury. He explains that what he had done was in view of difficulties which then existed, and especially because of the withdrawal of the Rev. James O'Kelly and thirty-six ministers. What he thought of was a union "not by a dereliction of ordination, sacraments, and the Methodist Discipline, but by a junction on proper terms." In regard to this he says :

* *Christian Advocate and Journal*, August 14, 1844, T. E. Bond and G. Coles, editors.

† Watson's *Life of John Wesley*. American Edition. p. 248.

Bishop White, in two interviews I had with him in Philadelphia, gave me reason to believe that this junction might be accomplished with ease. Dr. Magaw was perfectly sure of it. Indeed, (if Mr. Ogden of New Jersey, did not make a mistake in the information he gave me), a canon passed the house of bishops of the old Episcopal Church in favor of it. Bishop Madison, according to the same information, took the canon to the lower house. "But it was there thrown out," said Mr. Ogden, to whom I explained the whole business, "because they did not understand the full meaning of it."*

Meeting the question whether he "did not think that the episcopal ordination of Mr. Asbury was valid," Bishop Coke thus answers, using the word consecration rather than ordination: "I have no doubt but my consecration of Bishop Asbury was perfectly valid, and would have been so even if he had been reconsecrated." Then he says:

I never did apply to the General Convention or any other convention for reconsecration. I never intended that either Bishop Asbury or myself should give up our episcopal office, if the junction were to take place; but I should have had no scruple then, nor should I now, *if the junction were desirable*, to have submitted to, or to submit to, a reimposition of hands in order to accomplish a great object; but I do say again, *I do not now believe such a junction desirable*.

Again he says: "I do not consider the imposition of hands, on the one hand, as essentially necessary for any office in the Church; nor do I, on the other hand, think that the repetition of the imposition of hands for the same office, when important circumstances require it, is at all improper."

* Bangs's *Hist. of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. ii, pp. 207, 208.

He also says: "I am of our late venerable father Mr. Wesley's opinion, that *the order of bishops and presbyters is one and the same.*" *

This restates Wesley's opinion, and, coming from the very man who was said to have received "episcopal ordination" and "letters of episcopal orders," shows that these phrases were used in a qualified sense and did not imply that any higher order had been imparted, for "the order of bishops and presbyters is *one* and the *same.*" That Bishop Coke made such a statement to the Conference without any dissent shows also that it reflected the sentiment of the Conference.

Throughout all this period the identity of bishops and presbyters as to order has been tacitly and positively affirmed. There may have been some confusion in the use of terms, and it is barely possible that a few may have misunderstood the nature of the episcopate, but the transactions of the General Conference, as well as the statements of representative men, demonstrate that the early Methodist Episcopal Church understood that a bishop had no order above that of a presbyter or elder, and that the bishopric—"the episcopal office," as they called it—was not an order, but an office of an executive character, and that he who filled it was in office a superintendent or bishop, but in order merely a presbyter or elder.

* Bangs's *Hist. of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. ii, pp. 206-10.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BISHOPRIC FROM THE DEATH OF ASBURY TO 1844.

BISHOP ASBURY died on the last day of March, 1816, and on the twenty-third of the following month the Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, at the request of the Philadelphia Conference, delivered a funeral discourse in memory of the deceased Bishop. The sermon, with an appendix, was published in 1819 as an 18mo volume of 230 pages.

Cooper was present at the first meeting of Coke and Asbury, and was familiar with the views of the Church in those early days, and consequently his words have authority. In his sermon he declares that the founders of the denomination endeavored "to follow the Scriptures and the primitive Church;"* and in the appendix he calls the episcopacy of Methodism a "presbyterial episcopacy," and maintains that bishops and presbyters or elders are the "same order."† Thus the second period of the Church's history starts out with the very declaration which the Church at its beginning had received through Wesley's letter.

In a short time agitations concerning questions of polity greatly increased. The controversy referred

* Cooper on Asbury, p. 109.

† *Ibid.*, p. 215.

mainly to lay representation, but it also involved the episcopacy of the denomination, and the discussion called out strong writers. In 1820, the year following the publication of Cooper on Asbury, the Rev. Nathan Bangs, D.D., published his work on *Methodist Episcopacy*. In this he used language which created the suspicion that he meant to imply that the bishops had a distinct order above that of the elders. That his phraseology did not represent the voice of the Church, and that he was applying the word order in a new and objectionable sense, is evident from the fact that his phrases were promptly objected to, and he was attacked so vigorously for even appearing to teach that which the Church had never taught that at last he found it necessary, in defending himself, to write and print a letter explaining his language.

In this letter, which was published in 1827, in the appendix to Emory's *Defense of Our Fathers*, Dr. Bangs complained that he had been misunderstood, and explained that in his use of the word order, in that connection, he gave it a special definition. He says :

I use the word *order* merely for convenience, to avoid circumlocution, meaning thereby *nothing more* than that they were invested, by consent of the eldership, with a power to preside over the flock of Christ, and to discharge other duties not so convenient for the presbyters to discharge.

This definition, of course, makes the bishopric simply an office with delegated executive powers, and Bangs takes the force out of the word *order* in this

connection when he says that he used it in a qualified sense, and “merely for convenience, to avoid circumlocution,” and that he means this, and “*nothing more.*” Again, he states that he means that our bishops were like those ministers in the early Christian Church who were “denominated *evangelists,*” which certainly is not a very High Church notion. And again, in this letter, he says :

If any choose to say that we acknowledge two *orders only*, and a superior minister possessing a delegated jurisdiction, chiefly of an executive character, he has my full consent.

So Dr. Bangs gives his “full consent” to the declaration that “we acknowledge two *orders only* ;” and also that a bishop is merely “a superior minister possessing a delegated jurisdiction, chiefly of an executive character,” and the logical inference from this is that he held that the bishop was an executive officer, and that the bishopric was an office, and not a clerical order above the eldership. We should not overlook the fact that in the above quotations from Dr. Bangs’s letter, the italics, “*orders*,” “two *orders only*,” and “*nothing more*,” are his own.

That he considered bishops and presbyters to be the same order is manifest from other declarations which he makes. Thus he says :

That those denominated bishops, elders, or presbyters in the apostolical writings were one and the same order of men we will now endeavor to demonstrate.*

* Bangs’s *Vindication of Methodist Episcopacy*, p. 19.

Again, in his *Original Church of Christ*, published in 1836, and which has been a text-book in the course of ministerial study, he has "canceled" some views in the *Vindication*. In this new work he says:

The terms bishop, presbyter, and elder, signified, in the primitive Church, the same order of ministers. There was, however, as it appears, this difference: the term bishop was a *title of office*, signifying overseer, and the word presbyter referred to the order.*

Therefore, the term bishop is not descriptive of an order superior to that of presbyter.†

Again he says:

It is preposterous to infer that because a minister in the Church is distinguished by different appellations he is therefore of another *order*. Here is an elder or presbyter who has collocated with him several other presbyters, and who for convenience and an orderly conducting of business has an oversight of them, and is thence designated their *overseer*. At another time a society is called to transact some business peculiar to its organization, and he is called to preside, and is on that account called their *chairman* or *president*. Up springs a novice, and stretches his throat, and cries out, "You have created another *order of ministers!*" Does he need any arguments to refute him?‡

That he held the bishopric of our Church to be an office and not an order is seen also in the fact that in his *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, published in 1840, Dr. Bangs speaks of the episcopacy as

* Bangs's *Original Church*, p. 39.

† *Ibid.*, p. 46. ‡ *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 49.

an office;* and, further, from the fact that during the great discussion in the General Conference of 1844 he constantly spoke of "the *office* of bishop," and the "high *office* of a general superintendent," and refers to the bishop as "a general *officer* of the Church." †

In 1827, seven years after the appearance of Bangs's *Methodist Episcopacy*, the Rev. John Emory, D.D., published *A Defense of Our Fathers, and of the Original Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. At first sight there seems a little confusion in some of his phrases, but a careful reading and a just comparison of his statements show that the context fully qualifies his apparently unusual expressions. His object is to maintain the validity of the episcopate of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and he insists that there is nothing improper in having a service for setting apart bishops "even on the principle of two orders," for, "in this respect," he says, "both Mr. Wesley's usage and ours exactly correspond with that of the primitive Church according to Lord King," who "maintains that bishops and presbyters in the primitive Church were the same order." ‡

But Emory shows just how little weight he put upon the service for setting apart bishops by his indorsement of a quotation from John Dickins's pam-

* Bangs's *Hist. of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. iii. pp. 60, 78.

† Debate in the General Conference of 1844, p. 98.

‡ Emory's *Defense of Our Fathers*, p. 64.

phlet of 1792, in which Dickins declared "the superiority of the bishops" was not "by virtue of a separate ordination;"* and Emory himself refers to the superiority of our bishops as derived not from their "separate ordination."† Emory, therefore, following Dickins and Wesley, puts no stress upon the service; and, hence, as the separate service conferred no superiority, the bishop received through it no order distinct from and superior to the eldership.

Dr. Emory is meeting the allegation that because Methodism has no higher order than the eldership it has not a true episcopal form of government. This inference he denies, and says:

We have abundantly proved, according to ecclesiastical writers of the most distinguished celebrity, that an episcopal form of government is perfectly consistent with the admission that bishops and presbyters were primarily and inherently the same order. And we have especially proved that this was Mr. Wesley's view in particular.‡

Again he says:

The idea that *equals* cannot from among themselves constitute an officer who, as *an officer*, shall be superior to any of those by whom he was constituted, is contradicted by all experience and history, both civil and ecclesiastical, and equally so by common sense.§

All this refers to the episcopacy of our Church, and Emory calls the bishop an *officer*, and those who elected him his *equals*. That this is his meaning is

* Emory's *Defense*, p. 110.

† *Ibid.*, p. 60.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

§ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

seen a little further on, where, referring to Bishops Coke and Asbury, he says :

These church officers, after they were thus constituted and commissioned, *were* superior, *as our officers*, in the actual exercise of certain executive powers among us, to any individual of those by whom they were constituted.*

In 1830 Dr. Emory quotes Mr. McCaine as claiming that Mr. Wesley believed “that bishops and presbyters are essentially of one order.” To this Emory replied: “And do we dispute this? Have we not repeatedly averred the same thing with the utmost explicitness?” †

Again he declares :

The Methodist Episcopal Church not only admits, but asserts and maintains, and always has done so, that bishops and presbyters are inherently and essentially the same. Its episcopacy was originally and avowedly instituted, and still rests, on this very principle. In the strict ecclesiastical sense, they are inherently and essentially the same order.‡

One year later, namely, in 1831, Dr. Emory edited and added notes to the “First American Official Edition” of Watson’s *Life of Wesley*. In these notes, referring to Wesley’s setting apart of Coke as superintendent, he declares that even after that service, “according to Mr. Wesley’s own view, he could not be higher *in order* than a presbyter.” §

* Emory’s *Defense*, p. 65.

† *Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review*, 1830, p. 81.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

§ Watson’s *Life of Wesley*, Am. Ed., p. 253.

The issue as to whether the bishopric was an order or an office was soon squarely made, and just as squarely met. In 1828, the year after Emory's *Defense* appeared, Thomas E. Bond, M.D., wrote his *Narrative and Defense of the Proceedings of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore City Station*, and in 1852 this was re-issued as a part of Bond's *Economy of Methodism*. The author refers to the charge that Asbury had used language which implied that he thought he was "a bishop of the third order, and superior to presbyters."*

To this Dr. Bond thus replies :

As to the charge of our having at any time considered our bishops as a distinct ministerial order, contradistinguished from and superior to presbyters or elders, it has no foundation in fact. The very circumstance of our having acknowledged the *right* of elders to ordain is a sufficient refutation of the allegation. We consider the episcopacy a superior office in the Church—not a distinct ministerial order; and this is the light in which it has been considered ever since its institution.†

Dr. Bond's statement shows that the Church had recognized and made a distinction between "order" and "office" ever since the institution of the episcopacy. It is, indeed, a point of no little value in this investigation that Dr. Bond's phraseology so clearly shows that in the early days the word order and the word office were used as meaning entirely different things.

* Bond's *Economy of Methodism*, p. 117.

† *Ibid.*, p. 120.

That Dr. Bond was competent to give testimony on this question cannot be doubted. He was the great controversial writer of the Church, and his election to the editorship of *The Christian Advocate* in 1840 was no doubt due to the masterly ability he had displayed in the disputes of those days. He stood at a point in the history of the Church where he could speak authoritatively for the Church in his time, and from the time of its organization. When he wrote the passage just quoted he was in the prime of life, and with sufficient maturity to comprehend the view of the Church.

When Asbury died Dr. Bond was thirty-four years of age, and a practicing physician, so that even at that time he was old enough to have met all the "fathers" of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and, as he resided in Baltimore, he probably had met them, and from them learned their views and the views of the early Church. Besides this, his family connections opened to him reliable sources of information. He was a near relative of the Rev. John Wesley Bond, who was Bishop Asbury's traveling companion, and who was with the bishop when he died. Had Dr. Bond no other means of gaining information on this subject, this relationship alone would, no doubt, have been sufficient to secure him accurate knowledge as to the opinions of Asbury and of the Church prior to that day. Probably there was no one at that time more competent to speak for the Church.

Dr. Bond stood beside the fathers and knew the sons, and so was familiar with the ideas of both. For him, therefore, to say publicly to an antagonist that the Church from the beginning considered the bishopric as an office, and not “a distinct ministerial order, contradistinguished from and superior to presbyters or elders,” is most conclusive teaching, and sufficient to settle the question as to the view of the Church up to 1828, and even up to 1852, when his *Economy of Methodism* was issued.

In 1841 Bishop Hedding delivered a discourse before the New York, Providence, New England, and Maine Conferences on “The Administration of Discipline.” At the request of these Conferences he prepared it for publication, and it appeared in book form in 1842.

In this work he says :

The power with which the bishops are invested was formerly much greater than it is now, it being thought best by the General Conference to transfer part of it, from time to time, either to the elders or to the laity.*

The superintendents now have no power in the Church above that of elders, except what is connected with presiding in the Conferences, fixing the appointments of the preachers, and ordaining. They have no voice in any question to be decided by vote in any Conference; no vote even in making the rules by which they themselves are to be governed. They are the servants of the elders, to go out and execute their commands.†

The General Conference may expel a bishop, not only for immoral, but “for improper conduct, if they see it necessary.”

* Hedding on Discipline, p. 8.

† *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Improper conduct in our Discipline means a small offense below a crime; and though the preachers and private members may be expelled for that kind of offense when it is persisted in after repeated admonitions, yet no one but a bishop, not even a child or a slave, can be expelled for the first improper act of that character. And if a bishop be expelled he has no appeal.*

He also quotes approvingly from Coke and Asbury's notes on the Discipline, as, for example, the following, referring to the "stationing power" which the General Conference has given the episcopacy :

If ever it evidently betrays a spirit of tyranny or partiality, and *this* can be proved before the General Conference, the whole will be taken from it, and we pray God that in such case the power may be invested in other hands.†

He also remarks :

When it is considered that the very men, to wit, the traveling preachers, over whom the bishop exercises his power gave him that power; that they continue it in his hands; that they can reduce, limit, or transfer it into other hands whenever they see cause—there certainly can be no occasion for the vehement exclamations against the bishop's power which are frequently made by men of other churches and by a few misguided brethren of our *own*.‡

In the next General Conference Bishop Hedding's book was quoted a number of times to support the idea that the episcopacy was an office and not an order, and there is certainly reason to believe that Bishop Hedding, who was present, indorsed that interpretation.

* Hedding on Discipline, p. 12. † *Ibid.*, p. 16, ‡ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

On the 2d of April, 1844, the Rev. Charles Elliott, D.D., finished his *Life of Bishop Robert R. Roberts*. Dr. Elliott was one of the great and scholarly men of his time. As professor and college president, editor of three of the Church papers, and delegate to nine General Conferences, he was competent to speak with authority as to the views of his Church.

In his *Life of Bishop Roberts* he refers to the episcopacy as an office.* He maintains that the service used in setting apart bishops is not absolutely essential, and that bishops have no higher order than presbyters, thus restating the views of Dickins, Emory, and others, and harmonizing with Conference action. He says :

The mere imposition of hands is of little importance, and could be very well dispensed with did the General Conference see fit. Besides, a separate consecration in addition to election has the appearance of favoring the sentiment that Methodist bishops are considered a distinct order of clergy, whereas they are of *the same order* as presbyters, that is, *they are themselves presbyters* to whom certain powers are committed. Still, there is scriptural precedent for the imposition of hands. Paul and Barnabas were separated to a particular work by imposition of hands and prayer. Acts xiv. Perhaps in order to avoid the very appearance of an order of clergy superior to presbyters, as well as to preserve the complete oneness of the entire ministry, imposition of hands in appointing bishops had better be dispensed with; a mere certificate of office would fully answer every purpose provided for in Scripture and designed to be accomplished by the appointment of Methodist

* *Life of Bishop Roberts*. p. 169.

bishops. This is, however, a point not worth contending for.*

He also says :

Ordination in the Methodist Episcopal Church is presbyterial; that is, it is derived from and is under the control of the body of presbyters.†

Again Dr. Elliott says :

Methodist episcopacy recognizes these principles, is founded on them, and its practices correspond with them. It rejects what is called the distinct order of bishops, and resolves all its power into the body of the pastors and people, from whom it derives its authority, and to whom it is responsible for its proper exercise; and thus it well accords with the principles, the spirit, and the practice of the New Testament concerning Church government.‡

Speaking of the powers of bishops, he says :

The bishops are not members of the General Conference. They are not the delegates of any Annual Conference. They do not vote, neither do they debate. They preside also in the Annual Conferences, and yet they are not members of any of them.§

Thus authority after authority, down to the General Conference of 1844, maintain that the episcopate carried with it nothing but delegated official powers, and that the bishops were presbyters.

* *Life of Bishop Roberts*, chap. viii, pp. 171, 172.

† *Ibid.*, p. 171.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

§ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF 1844.

THE memorable General Conference of 1844 throws a strong light upon the nature of the episcopate and its relation to the highest representative body of the Church.

On the second day of the session the address of the bishops was read by Bishop Soule.* As this paper was presented early in the session its expressions were not due to the discussion which took place later in the session, and, consequently, may be taken as the unprejudiced statement of the bishops' opinion of the views of the Church. First, they say :

The general itinerant superintendency, vitally connected, as it is believed to be, with the effective operation, if not with the very existence, of the whole itinerant system, cannot be too carefully examined, or too safely guarded. And we have no doubt but you will direct your inquiries into such channels as to ascertain whether there has been any departure from its essential principles or delinquency in the administration in carrying it into execution ; and, in case of the detection of error, to apply such correction as the matter may require. There are several points in this system which are of primary importance, and on that account should be clearly understood. The office of a bishop or superintendent, according to our

* Dr. James Porter says the address was written by Bishop Soule,

ecclesiastical system, is almost exclusively executive ; wisely limited in its powers, and guarded by such checks and responsibilities as can scarcely fail to secure the ministry and membership against any oppressive measures, even should these officers so far forget the sacred duties and obligations of their holy vocation as to aspire to be lords over God's heritage. So far from their being irresponsible in their office, they are amenable to the General Conference, not only for their moral conduct, and for the doctrines they teach, but also for the faithful administration of the government of the Church, according to the provisions of the Discipline, and for all decisions which they make on questions of ecclesiastical law. In all these cases this body has original jurisdiction, and may prosecute to final issue in expulsion, from which decision there is no appeal.

Then they speak of "what is involved in the superintendency as it is constituted in our Church," as follows :

1. Confirming orders, by ordaining deacons and elders. We say *confirming*, because the orders are *conferred* by another body which is independent of the episcopal office both in its organization and action. This confirmation of orders or ordination is not by virtue of a distinct and higher *order*. For, with our great founder, we are convinced that bishops and presbyters are the same order in the Christian ministry. And this has been the sentiment of the Wesleyan Methodists from the beginning. But it is by virtue of an *office* constituted by the body of presbyters, for the better order of discipline, for the preservation of the unity of the Church, and for carrying on the work of God in the most effectual manner. The execution of this office is subject to two important restrictions which would be very irrelevant to prelacy or diocesan episcopacy, constituted on the basis of a distinct and superior order. The latter involves *independent action in conferring orders*, by virtue of authority inherent in, and exclusively appertaining to, the episcopacy. But the former is a delegated authority to *confirm*

orders, the exercise of which is dependent upon another body. The Bishop can ordain neither a deacon nor an elder without the election of the candidate by an Annual Conference, and, in case of such election, he has no discretionary authority, but is under *obligation* to ordain the person elected, whatever may be his own judgment of his qualifications. These are the two restrictions previously alluded to.*

This is certainly a wise and safe provision, and should never be changed or modified so as to authorize the bishops to ordain without the authority of the ministry. With these facts in view, it is presumed that it will be admitted by all well-informed and candid men that, so far as the constitution of the ministry is concerned, ours is a "moderate episcopacy." †

In this address the bishops say the episcopacy is not "a distinct and superior *order*," or "a distinct and higher *order*," and so emphatic are they that they italicize the word *order*. What is more, so anxious are they to make the point plain, that they specifically state "that bishops and presbyters are the same order," that this was the opinion of Wesley, the "great founder" of the Church, and that this was "the sentiment" of Methodists "from the beginning."

They go still further, and speak of "the episcopal office," and "the office of a bishop or superintendent;" that this office "is almost exclusively executive, with no "inherent" prerogatives, but with "delegated authority;" and so determined are they

* From 1784 to 1787 an ordination required the "consent" "of a superintendent." In the latter year the Conference took this veto power from the superintendent. (See Emory on Discipline, 1851, p. 120; Sherman on Discipline, 1874, p. 164.)

† Appendix to General Conference Journal of 1844, pp. 154, 155.

that it shall be understood as nothing more than “an *office*” that they italicize that word in contradistinction to the word order, and this address was signed by all the bishops, showing that it expressed their unanimous opinion.

The great question in the General Conference of 1844 was the case of Bishop James O. Andrew, who had “become connected with slavery,” not by purchase of slaves, but by inheritance and marriage.

The Rev. A. Griffith and the Rev. J. Davis, in view of this, offered the following :

Resolved, That the Rev. James O. Andrew be, and he is hereby, affectionately requested to resign his office as one of the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church.*

The Rev. J. B. Finley and the Rev. J. M. Trimble offered the following as a substitute :

Whereas, The Discipline of our Church forbids the doing of any thing calculated to destroy our itinerant general superintendency, and whereas Bishop Andrew has become connected with slavery by marriage and otherwise, and this act having drawn after it circumstances which, in the estimation of the General Conference, will greatly embarrass the exercise of his office as an itinerant general superintendent, if not, in some places, entirely prevent it ; therefore, *Resolved*, That it is the sense of this General Conference that he desist from the exercise of this office so long as this impediment remains.

After a long debate this was adopted,† and the friends of Bishop Andrew declared that this removed or deposed him from the episcopal office.‡

* General Conference Journal, 1844, p. 64.

† *Ibid.* p. 83.

‡ Debates of General Conference of 1844, p. 153.

The Rev. Alfred Griffith, in speaking to his resolution, referred to the title bishop, and said :

We use it only and exclusively to denote and designate the chief officer of the General Conference, the chief officer of the associated Annual Conferences of this union. A bishop among us is, therefore, only an officer of the General Conference created for specific purposes, and for no other than the purposes specified. He is chosen as the chief among his equals. Our bishops regard not themselves as a distinct order separate and apart from presbyters or elders. They are officers in the strict and proper sense of the term. The General Conference of 1808, at the same time that they restricted the delegated General Conference and prohibited them from destroying this office, reserved in their own hands the power to do it away altogether when it should so please them. Consequently they never designed—they never intended—to constitute the bishop an officer for life, under all circumstances.

We are here concerned exclusively with an officer of the General Conference. Whether the General Conference, constituted under such circumstances, has power to regulate her own officers—that is the question; and whether, when once she selects an officer, no change in his condition, no change in his situation, no embarrassment with which he may choose to involve himself, can be touched. No, sir; they have full authority to regulate their own officers, to provide for any exigency which may operate as a barrier in the way of the accomplishment of the objects and purposes for which the officers were chosen.*

The ministerial office does not, and cannot necessarily, involve the official relation of a bishop. I mean, it is one thing to be a minister, it is another and totally different thing to be a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It is true this high officer must of necessity be a minister, because he cannot perform the functions of his office unless he be a minister, in

* Debates of General Conference of 1844, p. 83.

view of the power of ordaining others conferred upon him, and the authority to superintend the spiritual and the temporal business of a great itinerant ministerial connection. He must be a minister, but yet, sir, his ministry—the power conferred upon him by his original ordination—does not necessarily constitute him that high officer of the General Conference. He comes to that by the free suffrages of his brethren. He is chosen as the chief among his equals. We therefore do not touch the ministerial character of Bishop Andrew. That is not now the question before us at all; but the simple question is, as an officer of the General Conference, chosen for a special purpose, to whom special duties are assigned, can he now perform the duties of his appointment with acceptance to the people he was selected to serve?

Though the bishops are set apart in due form by the imposition of hands, it is not with the design of conferring upon them any additional ministerial power, but of conferring upon them the authority of office to preside in our Conferences, to travel through all the length and breadth of the work, and to supervise and attend to the general interests of our great body.*

Dr. Nathan Bangs spoke of a bishop “as a general officer,” and the bishopric as an “office,” and said: “There are many things that would disqualify a man for holding the office of a bishop that do not amount to immorality;” for example, if a bishop “marry a free colored woman,” which “would not be an act of immorality,” and yet would “in the sense of the whole community disqualify him for his office;” or if, for example, Bishop Hedding should “declare that it was a sin to hold slaves under any circumstances. This would identify him with the ultra party, and,”

* Debates of General Conference of 1844, pp. 84, 85.

says Bangs, "I would vote for his retiring, because it would disqualify him for his work as superintendent of the whole Church," and so, he said :

It is on this principle that I say Bishop Andrew has disqualified himself by connecting himself with slavery, because he cannot acceptably exercise his duties as a general officer of the Church.*

The Rev. Mr. Cass said :

As much as I respect the office of bishop and the men who fill it, they are amenable to justice. They are the very last men who should not be censured if in the wrong. Mark this, sir, whenever there is a privileged order in the Methodist Episcopal Church the glory will have departed. Let this not be—no, never.†

The Rev. Mr. Comfort spoke of the "episcopal office," and said :

The proposed action of this Conference [that Bishop Andrew "desist from the exercise of his office"] did not affect his *orders*, but simply his jurisdiction as an officer of the General Conference. His *office* only was touched, not his *orders*—a distinction which could not be denied without involving the doctrine of *prelatical* episcopacy—a doctrine at the farthest remove from Methodism on this subject.

The Rev. J  sse T. Peck, afterward bishop, said :

Brethren talk of the infringement of their constitutional rights, but what do they mean by it ? That *any man* has a constitutional right to be a bishop ! There are no *constitutional rights* invaded. As to whether a man will do for a bishop or not the General Conference is the sole judge, either as to his election or retention. You might as well talk of a

* Debates of Gen. Conf. of 1844, pp. 97, 98.

† *Ibid.*, p. 108.

constitutional right to be an editor, or a book agent, or any other General Conference officer.*

He also held that if a bishop "should resign his episcopal office" he would still be "an elder in the Church of God."†

The Rev. J. A. Collins, of Baltimore, quoted from Hedding on the Discipline, and from Emory's *Defense*, and said :

According to them a bishop was but an officer of that General Conference; a high officer, he admitted—one whose very presence ought to inspire respect, and of whom they ought never to speak lightly; but still, after all, simply an officer of the General Conference.‡

He also asserted that

If there were no specific law the Conference had power to remove the officer it makes.§

In one of the debates the Rev. Mr. Winner, of New Jersey, remarked that "The *General Conference* is the supreme power of the Church, not the episcopacy."||

Dr. Durbin spoke of the "episcopal office," and quoted Coke, Asbury, and Dickins to prove that a bishop, as an officer, was subject to the General Conference. He also opposed the idea "that the General Conference has no power to remove a bishop or to suspend the exercise of his functions, unless by impeachment and trial in regular form for some offense regularly charged."¶

* Debates of Gen. Conf. of 1844, p. 116.

† *Ibid.*, p. 120.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 147. § *Ibid.*, p. 147. || *Ibid.*, p. 78. ¶ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

The greatest speech in this great debate was delivered by Dr. Hamline, who, before the session closed, was himself made a bishop. In his argument he referred to the bishop as an "officer," and to his position as the "bishop's office," and said: "In clerical orders every man on this floor is his equal."

Again he said: "That the bishop's is an office is, I suppose, conceded." So well settled was this idea that Dr. Hamline, in the presence of that able General Conference, dared to say, and take it for granted, that it was a "conceded" fact not requiring argument, as it would not be disputed; and certainly this was the prevailing view of the General Conference of 1844.

This remarkable speech was so strong and so clearly voiced the sentiments of the Conference that it should be given entire, but its length forbids more than a few extracts. He said:

Strict amenability in Church officers, subordinate and superior, is provided for in our Discipline. From the class-leader upward this amenability regards not only major but minor morals—not only the *vices*, but also the *improprieties*, of behavior. The class-leader, by mere eccentricity, becomes unpopular in his class. The pastor at discretion removes him from his office. The exhorter or unordained local preacher proves unacceptable, and a quarterly conference refuses to renew his license. The itinerant pastor is not useful in charge, and the bishop or the presiding elder deposes him from his charge or from the pastoral office, and makes him an assistant. The presiding elder impairs his usefulness on a district, not by gross *malfeasance* but by a slight *misfeasance*, or, oftener still,

because "he is not popular," and the bishop removes him to a station or a circuit, and perhaps makes him an assistant. I speak not now of annual appointments, when the term of the itinerant expires by limitation, but of removals by the bishop or the presiding elder in the intervals of Conference, which always imply a deposing from office as well as a stationing act. In all these instances the manner of removing from office is peculiar. First, it is *summary*, without accusation, trial, or formal sentence. It is a ministerial, rather than a judicial act. Second, it is for no crime, and generally for no misdemeanor, but for being "unacceptable." Third, most of these removals from office are by a sole agent, namely, by a bishop or preacher, whose will is omnipotent in the premises. Fourth, the removing officer is not legally obliged to assign any cause for deposing. If he do so it is through courtesy, and not as of right. Fifth, the deposed officer has no appeal.

Is he, who can at discretion, by himself or by his agents, remove from office so many, among whom are thousands of his co-ordinates or peers, subject in turn to no such summary control? We have seen that to lodge this power of removal in superior and impose submission to it on inferior officers is the fashion of Methodism. She loves the system. She carries it up through many grades of office until we reach the bishop. Does it suddenly stop there? If so, on what ground? I can conceive none.

But is the episcopacy in regard to this question supreme? Certainly not. The General Conference, adjunct in certain exigencies with the Annual Conferences, is the ultimate depository of power in our Church. I shall argue our authority to depose a bishop summarily for improprieties morally innocent, which embarrass the exercise of his functions, *from the relations of the General Conference to the Church and to the episcopacy.*

Its legislative supremacy consists of "*full powers to make rules,*" as the Discipline words it.

In legislation the bishop has not only peers, but more than peers. In clerical orders every man on this floor is his equal, but in legislative functions his superior. This

Conference has judicial supremacy. Every member on the floor wears the ermine, which you (the bishops) may not assume. Each of us blends in himself the functions of both judge and juryman, to which you are an utter stranger. And in the meantime you are liable, as I suppose, to be stripped by us of those other high prerogatives of which, by our countenance, you now hold investiture. You see, then, that as a bishop you were both elevated and depressed. In regard to legislative and judicial prerogatives, when you went up you went down. Your station in the General Conference is a peculiar eminence. Your high seat is not at all terrific in concealed or outbeaming power. It is like a gallery of disabilities, where, as a spectator of tragedy, you can do little more than admire or reprobate the piece, and smile or frown upon the actors. But, sir, such as it is, you and we approve it, and you would be as unwilling as ourselves to see your prerogatives changed by increase or diminution. You are high up and low down; and all (but yourselves most of all) are content that we—as we mean by grace to do—should keep you up and keep you down. The General Conference is the *fountain* of all official executive authority. It has full powers also “to make *regulations*” for the government of the Church. What is a regulation? To appoint a preacher to a field of labor is a regulation. To remove him to another field is a regulation. To elect and empower a bishop to do this for us is a regulation. To recall that bishop to his former station is a regulation. Now, “what a man does by another he does himself” is a maxim in law. The General Conference may make these regulations without a bishop and leave him a less onerous superintendence, or the Conference may make these regulations by a bishop and multiply the toils of his superintendence. Now, sir, all that this Conference can confer it can withhold. And whatever it can confer and withhold it can *resume* at will, unless a constitutional restriction forbids it. It can resume then all the powers granted to a bishop by its own act, except such prerogatives as are essential to epis-

copacy and superintendency. Our Church constitution recognizes the episcopacy as an abstraction, and leaves this body to work it into a concrete form in any hundred or more ways we may be able to invent. We may make one, five, or twenty bishops; and, if we please, one for each Conference. We may refuse to elect another until all die or resign; and then to maintain the episcopacy, which we are bound to do, we must elect one at least. As to his term, we may limit it at pleasure, or leave it undetermined. But in this case is it *undeterminable*? Certainly not. The power which elected may then displace. In all civil constitutions, as far as I know, not to fix an officer's term is to suspend it on the will of the appointing power. Cabinet ministers and secretaries are examples. No officer as such can claim incumbency for life unless such a term be authoritatively and expressly fixed upon.

Referring to the rule giving the General Conference power to expel for "improper conduct," he remarked :

"Having power to expel," sets forth the extent to which we may proceed in our efforts to guard against the consequences of a bishop's improprieties. The expulsion contemplated is doubtless from office. For though *depose* is the word generally used in such connections, expel is not less significant of the thing. To put out of office is expulsion. If any dispute, and say the expulsion must be from orders, or from the Church, we answer, a power to expel from Church is certainly equal to the power of removing from office. The child who has license to play *all* day need not dread the rod for playing *half* a day; and the boy who is told he may ride ten cannot disobey by riding five miles. That argument is hard pushed which resorts to the phrase, "have power to expel," to prove that the Conference has not power to depose. "*Improper conduct*" means less than *imprudent* conduct. Imprudence carries our thoughts to the neighborhood of crime. It means a

want of wisdom to a degree which involves exposure and harm. Improper means simply not suitable, or unfitting. The *usus loquendi* in the Discipline forbids us to assume that in some generic sense it embraces crime. Whatever is unfitting a bishop's office, and would impair his usefulness in the exercise of its functions, is embraced, I conceive, in the phrase "improper conduct." In the Discipline it is used in contradistinction from crime. And it is never treated as crime in the administration, except when a private member, after frequent admonitions, obstinately refuses to reform. In such a case obstinacy itself becomes a criminal state of mind, and may procure expulsion. Finally the phrase, "if they see it necessary," sheds light on the whole paragraph. It proves that improper does not mean criminal; for then it would be necessary, and the condition would be useless. The phrase accords to the Conference discretionary power, and invites them to proceed on the ground of "expediency," of which some have loudly complained. They may expel him, if they see it to be proper or expedient—that is, if his improprieties injure his usefulness in the high office where our suffrages placed him.

Continuing, he said :

My mind, sir, if not my words, has all along *distinguished between orders and office*. The summary removals which I have noticed are from office, not from the ministry. In regard to ordained preachers, these two rules will hold: First, they cannot be expelled from the ministry summarily; but must have a trial in due form. Second, they cannot be expelled for "improper conduct," but only for a crime clearly forbidden in the word of God. But if others, they too may be deposed from office summarily, and for improprieties which, even if they be innocent, hinder their usefulness, or render their ministrations a calamity. That the bishop's is an office is, I suppose, conceded. True, we ordain him; but we may cease to ordain, and, by suspending the Conference rule which

requires a day's delay, may immediately blot from the Discipline these words (page 26): "and the laying on of the hands of three bishops, or at least of one bishop and two elders." Would not this harmonize our practice and our principles?

We have seen that, when clerical orders or membership in the Church is concerned, crime only, or obstinate impropriety, which is *as* crime, can expel. This is Methodism. We have seen, on the other hand, that, as to office, removals from it may be summary, and for any thing unfitting that office, or that renders its exercise unwholesome to the Church. I urged this *fashion* of Methodism as applicable especially to a bishop, because his superior influence will render his improprieties proportionably more embarrassing and injurious to the Church.

Shall one elder holding a high *office* at our hands be so puissant that, like the sun in the heavens (though he be a planet still, and in his office reflects no light which we have not shed upon him), he must bind and control all, but is in turn to be controlled by none? No, sir. This Conference is the sun in our orderly and beautiful system. When the Church is about to suffer a detriment which we by constitutional power can avert, it is as much *treason in us not to exercise the power we have as to usurp in other circumstances that which we have not*.*

Some of the Southern delegates opposed such views as have been quoted, and it is evident that, in the effort to defend their bishop, they were driven to the necessity of making claims for the episcopacy which were novel, and which had not been received by the Church itself. After the Conference had, by a large majority, pronounced against Bishop Andrew, the Southern members, who were in the minority, filed a protest embodying views to which some of the minority had given expression during the progress of the

* *Debates of General Conference of 1844*, pp. 128-134.

discussion. "The Protest" of the Southern delegates does not deny, but admits, that the bishopric is an office—"the episcopal office"—and an "official" "station," and refers to the bishops as "officers" and "executive officers;" but it claims that "the episcopacy is a co-ordinate branch, the executive department proper, of the government." *

Dr. Bond, who was present at this Conference, says :

To sustain this view of the episcopacy, its advocates were compelled to take High-Church grounds, bordering upon Puseyism itself. Our episcopacy, they alleged, "in its origin and perpetuation, is derived from Mr. Wesley alone;" and the right of episcopal jurisdiction is communicated in ordination, and not in election by the General Conference. Here is the divine right of succession with a vengeance, differing from the prelatical pretension only in deriving the succession through presbyters instead of bishops; for Mr. Wesley was only a presbyter. He had expressly denounced the prelatical doctrine of succession as a fable; and we are not to suppose, without some proof, that he held the doctrine of succession through presbyters as a whit more orthodox than through prelates.†

Alluding to the rule of the Discipline making the bishops amenable to the General Conference, Dr. Bond says :

The minority of the Conference, finding it impossible to evade the force or escape the consequences of this rule of discipline, resorted, in their speeches and "Protest," to doctrines in respect to Methodist episcopacy which, if not entirely new, had only been attributed by the most bitter enemies of

* Appendix H, General Conference Journal, 1844.

† *Methodist Quarterly Review*, 1851, p. 412.

our Church government, and which had been disavowed as a slander by its defenders.*

He further observes :

But these High-Church notions of episcopal authority, independence, and jurisdiction had to encounter the well-settled theory of Methodist episcopacy, as stated and explained by the first bishops of the Church, and by Dr. Emory in his *Defense of the Fathers*, and it was crushed and annihilated by the contact. The High-Church notions of episcopal authority and independence assumed in the Protest constituted no part of primitive American Methodism, or of the opinions of those who instituted Methodist episcopacy. Nor has there been any change in this respect since the present form of Church government was instituted.†

Again, he says :

It would appear, therefore, that this novel doctrine of episcopal authority and jurisdiction was taken up by the delegates from the slave-holding Conferences to serve a purpose, and was founded on no just or tenable grounds whatever.‡

When the "Protest" was presented, Mr. Simpson, as the report terms one who afterward was honored as Bishop Simpson, offered a resolution declaring that "they could not admit the statements put forth in the Protest," and directing "that a committee, consisting of Messrs. Durbin, Olin, and Hamline, be appointed to make a true statement of the case to be entered on the Journal."§ This showed that "Mr." Simpson, the future bishop, denied the positions of

* *Methodist Quarterly Review*, 1851, p. 411.

† *Ibid.*, 1851, p. 412.

‡ *Ibid.*, 1851, p. 413.

§ *Debates of General Conference of 1844*, p. 212.

the minority, and the composition of his proposed committee showed what views he desired affirmed.

The above committee was ordered, but when Dr. Hamline had been elected bishop, and Dr. Olin had gone home, Dr. George Peck and Dr. Charles Elliott, on motion of Mr. Simpson, were put in their places.

This very able committee presented a reply to the "Protest," in which they remark :

In order to make out that the General Conference had no right to take such action as they have in Bishop Andrew's case, the authors of the Protest have been driven to the necessity of claiming for the Methodist episcopacy powers and prerogatives never advanced before, except by those who wished to make it odious, and which have always been repudiated by its chosen champions. The Protest maintains that "the episcopacy is a co-ordinate branch of the government;" for which no argument is adduced save this—that it is, in general, the province of bishops to ordain bishops ; a sufficient answer to which may be found in the principle of Methodist polity, stated in the address of the bishops to the present General Conference, that orders (the principle applies to bishops, though not expressly named, as well as to elders and deacons) are "conferred" by the election, and only "confirmed" by the ordination; and that when the election has been made the bishop "has no discretional authority, but is under *obligation* to ordain the person elected, whatever may be his own judgment of his qualifications." And if all the bishops should refuse to ordain the person elected by the General Conference, that body would unquestionably have the right to appoint any three elders to ordain him, as is provided "in case there be no bishop remaining in our Church." The Protest declares that "the bishops are, beyond doubt, an integral constituent part of the General Conference, made such

by law and the constitution." If the words "General Conference" be not a mere clerical error, the assertion is sufficiently refuted by the answer in the Discipline to the question, "Who shall compose the General Conference?" and by the practice of the bishops themselves, who disclaim a right to give even a casting vote, or even to speak in General Conference, except by permission. The Protest maintains that, "in a sense by no means unimportant, the General Conference is as much the *creature* of the episcopacy as the bishops are the creatures of the General Conference;" the proof adduced for which is, that "constitutionally the bishops alone have the right to fix the time of holding the Annual Conference; and should they refuse or neglect to do so, no Annual Conference could meet according to law; and, by consequence, no delegates could be chosen, and no General Conference could be chosen, or even exist;" that is to say, because for the convenience of the bishops in performing their tour they are allowed to say *at what time in the year* an Annual Conference shall meet; therefore they have the power to prevent such body from meeting at all, though, from its very name, it must meet once a year!—that by preventing the meeting of Annual Conferences they might prevent the organization of any General Conference and thus, escaping all accountability for their delinquencies, might continue to lord it over God's heritage, until themselves and the Church should die a natural death. We can easily perceive, were this reasoning legitimate, that the bishops might *destroy*, not only the General Conference, but the Church; but are at a loss to discover how it proves that they can *create* either. We must protest against having any argument of ours adduced as analogous to this.

The Protest maintains that "the General Conference has no right, power, or authority, ministerial, judicial, or administrative," in any way to subject a bishop "to any official disability whatever, without the formal presentation of a charge or charges, alleging that the bishop to be dealt with has been guilty of the violation of some law, or at least some disciplin-

ary obligation of the Church, and also upon conviction of such charge, after due form of trial." To those who are not familiar with the Methodist economy this might seem plausible; but it is, in reality, an attempt to except, from the action of a general system, those who, least of all, ought to be excepted. The cardinal feature of our polity is the itinerancy.

To sustain this system it is essential that the classes should receive the leaders that are appointed by the preacher; that the societies should receive the preachers that are stationed over them by the bishops; that the Annual Conferences should receive the bishops that are sent to them by the General Conference. Unless, therefore, the utmost care be taken by those who have authority in the premises, that these parties shall severally be acceptable to those among whom they labor, there is great danger that those who are injured by such neglect may seek redress by revolutionary measures. For this reason the officers of the Methodist Church are subjected regularly to an examination unknown, it is believed, among other denominations. Not only is provision made for formal trials, in cases of crimes and misdemeanors, but there is a special arrangement for the correction of other obstructions to official usefulness. At every Annual Conference the character of every traveling preacher is examined; at every General Conference that of every bishop. And the object is to ascertain not merely whether there is ground for the formal presentation of the charges, with a view to a regular trial, but whether there is "any objection"—any thing that might interfere with the acceptance of the officer in question among his charge. And it is doctrine novel and dangerous in the Methodist Church that such difficulties cannot be corrected unless the person objected to be formally arraigned under some specific law, to be found in the concise code of the Discipline—doctrine not the less dangerous because it is applied where "objections," unimportant in others, might be productive of the most disastrous consequences. Will the Methodist Church sanction the doctrine that while all its other officers,

of whatever name or degree, are subjected to a sleepless supervision, are counseled, admonished, or changed, "as necessity may require, and as the Discipline directs," a bishop, who decides all questions of law in Annual Conferences; who, of his mere motion and will, controls the work and destiny of four thousand ministers; who appoints and changes at pleasure the spiritual guides of four millions of souls; that the depository of these vast powers, whose slightest indiscretions or omissions are likely to disturb the harmony, and even impair the efficiency of our mighty system of operations, enjoys a virtual impunity for all delinquencies or misdoings not strictly criminal?

It is believed that an attempt to establish such an episcopal supremacy would fill not only a part, but the whole of the Church "with alarm and dismay." But this doctrine is not more at variance with the genius of Methodism than it is with the express language of the Discipline, and the exposition of it by all our standard writers. The constitution of the Church provides that "the General Conference shall have full power to make rules and regulations for our Church," under six "limitations and restrictions," among which the only one relating to the episcopacy is this: They shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government so as to do away episcopacy, or destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency." As there is nothing in the restrictive rules to limit the full powers of the General Conference in the premises, so is there nothing in the special provision respecting the responsibility of a bishop. In reply to the question, "To whom is a bishop amenable for his conduct?" the Discipline declares, "To the General Conference, who have power to expel him for improper conduct, if they see it necessary." And this, be it remembered, is all that is said respecting the jurisdiction over a bishop, with the exception of a rule for his trial, in the interval of a General Conference, if he be guilty of immorality. In full accordance with the plain meaning of these provisions is the language of all the standard writers on Methodist polity.

Bishop Emory, a man of whom it is no injustice to the living or the dead to say that he was a chief ornament and light of our episcopacy; that he brought to the investigation of all ecclesiastical subjects a cool, sagacious, powerful, practical intellect, fully sustains the positions we have assumed in behalf of the powers of the General Conference over the bishops of our Church. He gives an unqualified assent to the following passage from the notes to the Discipline prepared by Bishops Asbury and Coke, at the request of the General Conference: "They (our bishops) are entirely dependent on the General Conference;" "their power, their usefulness, themselves, are entirely at the mercy of the General Conference."

Dr. Emory also quotes some passages from a pamphlet by the Rev. John Dickins, which, he says, was published by the unanimous request of the Philadelphia Conference, and may be considered as expressing the views both of that Conference and of Bishop Asbury, his intimate friend. Mr. Dickins affirms that the bishops derive their power from the election of the General Conference, and not from their ordination; and that the Conference has on that ground power to remove Bishop Asbury, and appoint another, "if they see it necessary." He affirms that Bishop Asbury "derived his official power from the Conference, and therefore his office is at their disposal." Mr. Asbury was "responsible to the General Conference, who had power to remove him, if they saw it necessary;" "he is liable every year to be removed."

The above quotations show very clearly the sentiments of Asbury and Coké and Dickins on this question—men chiefly instrumental in laying the foundations of our polity.

Equally clear and satisfactory is the testimony of another venerable bishop, who still lives, in the full exercise of his mental powers and benignant influence, to guide and bless the Church: "The superintendents now have no power in the Church above that of elders, except what is connected with presiding in the Conference, fixing the appointments of the preachers, and ordaining." "They are the servants of the

elders, and go out and execute their commands;" "the General Conference may expel a bishop not only for immoral but '*improper* conduct,' which means a small offense below a crime; for which not even a child or a slave can be expelled but after repeated admonitions;" "the traveling preachers gave the bishop his power, they continue it in his hands, and they can reduce, limit, or transfer it to other hands, whenever they see cause." Such is the language of Bishop Hedding, who only concurs in the moderate, truly Methodist views of Bishops Asbury, Coke, and Emory.*

This reply, which had been ordered by the Conference, was, on motion of E. R. Ames, subsequently made bishop, ordered to be entered upon the Journal and to be printed, by a vote of 116 for and 26 against,† and so it became the expression of the Conference.

These views are that the bishops are presbyters and that the episcopate is an office under the control of the General Conference, and the action of the Conference in the case of Bishop Andrew is based upon that ground. These views were sustained by a large majority, and, as the minority subsequently seceded, it left the view of the majority the view of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This Conference not only expressed its own opinion, but declared that the position maintained by it had been the doctrine of the Church from the beginning.

* Gen. Conf. Jour. of 1844, pp. 206-209. *Ibid.*, pp. 142, 143.

CHAPTER X.

THE EPISCOPATE FROM 1844 TO 1884.

IN 1847 the Rev. Abel Stevens, LL.D., the celebrated historian of Methodism, issued his work on *Church Polity*. In this he has a chapter with the heading, "Bishops and Presbyters the Same in Order." After citing many authorities, and presenting many arguments proving that bishops are the same in order as presbyters, he says :

The episcopacy of the Methodist Church is precisely in accordance with the foregoing views ; that is, it is presbyterian, our bishops being considered but presbyters in *order*, differing from presbyters only in *office*, as *primi inter pares*, first among equals.*

In another chapter, on the "Origin of the Methodist Episcopacy," speaking of the title bishop, he says : "Wesley did not condemn the *office*, which he approved and *created*, but merely the name."† Further, he says, "The bishops are considered to be of the same ministerial order, having only a distinct office, which itself is based on *expediency*, not on an alleged *apostolic succession*."‡

Passing to the General Conference of 1852, we find that at its session occurred a memorable event

* Stevens's *Church Polity*, p. 61. † *Ibid.*, p. 90. ‡ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

which strengthened the former views of the Church in regard to its episcopacy. The General Conference Journal of May 10, 1852, has this record :

The superintendents presented a communication from Bishop Hamline, tendering his resignation of the episcopal office, which was read ; also, a letter from his physicians, which was read.*

Bishop Hamline's resignation contained these words :

And now I think that the circumstances warrant my declining the office. Eight years ago I felt that Divine Providence had strangely called me to the office. I now feel that the same Providence permits me to retire. I therefore tender my resignation, and request to be released from my official responsibilities, as soon as the way is prepared by the episcopal committee.†

The resignation was referred to the Committee on Episcopacy, of which the Rev. P P. Sandford was chairman, and on which were such men as Dr. N. Bangs, Dr. John S. Porter, and the Rev. Alfred Griffith. The Committee the very next day reported in favor of approving Bishop Hamline's administration and character, and this the Conference unanimously agreed to. The committee also submitted the following resolution :

Resolved, That the resignation of Bishop Hamline of his office as a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America be, and the same hereby is, accepted.

* General Conference Journal, 1852, p. 36. † *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 42.

For this resolution the Rev. J. A. Collins submitted the following as a substitute :

Resolved, By the delegates of the several Annual Conferences, in General Conference assembled, that the bishops be, and they hereby are, requested to return to Bishop Hamline his parchment accompanied with a communication informing him that this General Conference declines accepting his resignation as a superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and grants him unrestricted permission, and advises him to adopt and pursue such course for the restoration of his health as his judgment may dictate.

A motion was made to lay this on the table, and on it the yeas and nays were called, and the substitute was laid on the table by a vote of one hundred and sixty-one yeas to only ten nays ; and among those who voted to lay it on the table were L. Scott, M. Simpson, O. C. Baker, E. R. Ames, E. Thomson, and C. Kingsley, all of whom were made bishops, the first four being elected at that Conference.

The resignation was then accepted, and the following resolution, offered by the Rev. J. A. Collins, was adopted :

Resolved, By the delegates of the several Annual Conferences, in General Conference assembled, that the bishops be, and hereby are, respectfully requested to convey to Bishop Hamline the acceptance of his resignation as a superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal Church by the General Conference, accompanied with a communication expressing the profound regret of this body that the condition of his health has, in his judgment, rendered it proper for him to relinquish his official position ; assuring him also of our continued confidence and affection, and that our fervent prayers will be offered to the

throne of grace that his health may be restored and his life prolonged to the Church.*

The language used, both by the bishop and the Conference, showed that both held that the episcopacy was an office, and the action of Bishop Hamline and the Conference showed that it was an office from which a bishop could resign and cease to be a bishop, and, ceasing to be a bishop, would take his place among the elders in an Annual Conference.

All this is contrary to the notion of the episcopacy as a higher order. In Churches which believe that the bishop has an order distinct from and superior to that of a presbyter, it is held that a bishop may resign his jurisdiction but that he does not cease to be a bishop. In the Methodist Episcopal Church, however, when a bishop resigns his jurisdiction, he resigns every thing which he has above that of an ordinary presbyter. He resigns his office, but retains his order as a presbyter; and so Bishop Hamline, when he resigned the "episcopal office," ceased to be a bishop, and went back as a mere elder to the Ohio Conference, to which he belonged at the time he was elected bishop, and that Conference, of which he had once more become a member, granted him a superannuated relation;† so that Bishop Hamline, the elder in the episcopate, became again Doctor Hamline, an elder among elders in an Annual Conference.

* General Conference Journal, 1852, pp. 41-43.

† McClintock & Strong's *Cyclo.*, art. "Hamline."

Thus again Methodism denied the doctrine "Once a bishop always a bishop."

The Rev. T. M. Eddy, D.D., in his sketch of Bishop Hamline, referring to his resignation, says:

It was not broken health alone which led him to this decision, or a desire to be entirely free from care. He was actuated by a sense of high consistency. In 1844 he held and maintained, with great force, that the Methodist episcopate is not an exalted *order* of the holy ministry, but an *office* of grave responsibility and dignity, it is true, but still an *office*—and one which can be vacated for disqualification by the General Conference without the formality of an impeachment, or by the voluntary retirement of the officer. Now he would do the Church the service of showing by example that it could not be vacated by the resignation of an incumbent. He meant in 1852 to emphasize the doctrine he taught eight years before.*

Dr. Eddy also remarks that

A brief but historic debate followed, and the final action was an assertion of the Low Church theory of the episcopacy.†

From the organization of the Church, in 1784, the service for setting apart the bishops contained the following:

Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a bishop in the Church of God now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands, etc.

That Wesley, with his Low Church views, permitted this to remain in the service shows that the ritual was prepared in such haste that there was not sufficient time to make a thorough revision.

* Flood and Hamilton's *Lives of Methodist Bishops*, p. 302.

† *Ibid.*, p. 303.

That the Church for so many years had tolerated it, when it was inconsistent with the general teachings of the Church, shows either that the Church was so conservative that it made changes slowly, or that no one up to that time had been misled by the phraseology, or that the Church had been too busy with other matters to give it the attention it deserved.

The latter explanation is the most probable. From the beginning, the Church had heart, head, and hands full of practical work, and the prevailing Low Church ideas had prevented this phraseology from modifying the true doctrine of the Church.

At first the Church was engrossed by the evangelistic movements which were necessary in the formative period of the denomination. Then it had to defend itself against the antagonism of those who seceded from it or who belonged to other communions. Then came the great controversy on the slavery question which culminated in the discussion and decision in the General Conference of 1844, and which was followed by the secession of the Southern section and the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in 1845. After this came many questions which were sequences from the separation, so that the Church had not time to correct errors which perhaps were considered of only minor importance, or which were scarcely noticed in the rush and excitement of an eventful history. Now, however, the time had arrived when it was deemed necessary to eliminate

some of these inconsistent expressions, and in the General Conference of 1852 the Rev. Calvin Kingsley, afterward bishop, submitted a resolution to strike out the objectionable phrases, and make that part of the service read :

The Lord pour upon thee the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a bishop in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands, etc.*

The resolution, which was seconded by Dr. James Porter, was laid over under the rule governing such matters, and as it was not presented until near the close of the session the pressure of other business prevented its being reached. There was also presented a communication from the Troy Conference referring to an amendment to the ritual, which showed that the Church generally was beginning to demand a revision.†

In the General Conference of 1856 the question of the revision of the Church ritual came up again. Dr. John McClintock, who had been chairman of a similar committee in 1852, was made chairman of this committee, but, for a time, presumably during the absence of Dr. McClintock, Dr. F. G. Hibbard acted as chairman. On motion of Dr. McClintock, the papers presented by the Committee on Revisals in 1852 were referred to the new committee.‡

Dr. McClintock offered a resolution instructing the

* General Conference Journal, 1852, p. 87.

† *Ibid.*, 1852, p. 15.

‡ *Ibid.*, 1856, p. 53.

Committee on Revisals "to inquire whether any, and what, verbal alteration or change of arrangement in the Book of Discipline be necessary,"* and Dr. Hibbard moved that the Committee on Revisals be instructed "to report some method of revising the rituals of our Church." †

This committee reported that the rituals had various defects, and chiefly because

their pertinency and salutary influence "are seriously" affected by the declaration of sentiments, which are not only irrelevant to the occasion, but in some instances adverse to the genius of our faith and of our Church polity. Nor is this matter of surprise when we consider that our denominational and our Church polity both were borrowed from the rubrics of a foreign Church.

The errors in our rituals are greatly mitigated and neutralized on the one hand by the softening terms which we have from time to time introduced, and on the other from important omissions from the English Prayer Book. They do not, therefore, threaten any immediate injury, and, with the modifying sense which our denominational faith and piety affix to the language, may continue safely for a while to be used. But their tendency is to beget, by imperceptible advances, a faith in our membership contrary to our standards; and if suffered to remain in future as now, and should our Church ever decline from her present spiritual life and relapse into an inert formalism, she would find in her Discipline the materials to vindicate baptismal regeneration, the apostolical succession of bishops, and the doctrine of three priestly orders.

A large portion of our ministry and membership are grieved to find in our most solemn forms the sanction of doctrines which neither we nor our fathers believe. ‡

* Gen. Conf. Jour., 1856, p. 59. † *Ibid.*, p. 77. ‡ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

This is remarkable language. It shows that phrases in the ritual were liable to an interpretation which the Church in 1856 did not accept and which the fathers did not believe—that, receiving a hastily prepared service from a “foreign Church,” the Church had always been compelled to qualify these expressions and especially by “the modifying sense which our denominational faith and piety affix to the language,” and, consequently, the doctrine of the Church was not to be inferred from these phrases in the ritual.

This report also shows that the Church in that day did not believe in “the apostolical succession of bishops,” or “the doctrine of three priestly orders,” but that it foresaw the danger that by imperceptible advances through familiarity with misleading words and phrases there might be begotten “a faith in our membership contrary to our standards,” so that, as this tendency continued, the Church might come to believe that the Church had “three priestly orders,” and even to believe in “the apostolical succession of bishops.”

The General Conference, therefore, appointed a committee of five to revise the rituals.* The matter again came up in the General Conference of 1860, and the Rev. Davis W. Clark was made chairman of the committee to which the subject was referred. The result of the further inquiry was that the com-

* General Conference Journal, 1856, p. 168.

mittee was instructed to report at an early day to the next General Conference.*

In the General Conference of 1864 Dr. Davis W. Clark again was made chairman of the Committee on Revisals, and he acted as such until he was elected bishop, when Dr. Freeborn G. Hibbard took his place. The Rev. Dr. Daniel Curry says that Dr. Clark "was especially concerned in preparing and carrying through the Conference the revised ritual of the Church, of which he was, more than any other, the author."†

This committee recommended various changes in the ritual, and especially in the service for bishops, and on its recommendation the General Conference struck out the word "ordination," which was misleading, and, according to the well settled doctrine of the Church, a misnomer, and substituted the word "consecration." The Church had been charged with inconsistency in calling a service an "ordination" when it did not exalt to a higher "order," and while its bishops were only elders; and, so, to be consistent in form, as well as in fact, and to check supposed High-Church tendencies‡ or dangers, this substitution and other marked changes were made by the General Conference.§

* General Conference Journal, 1860, p. 305.

† Dr. Curry, on Bishop Clark, in *Lives of Methodist Bishops*, p. 410.

‡ So say Dr. F. G. Hibbard and Dr. Bostwick Hawley, who were members of the committee.

§ General Conference Journal, 1864, pp. 126, 246, 471.

The word "ordination" had been used in reference to the service for bishops, but it was used in a qualified sense as not an "ordering" service, and as far back as 1792 the word "consecration" had been put in the Discipline evidently to show a distinction between the service for the ordination of elders, which carried with it the idea of order, and the service for bishops, which carried with it the idea of office; and in the same way Bishops Coke and Asbury used the word "consecration" in their *Notes on the Discipline*, which were published in 1796 by the authority of the Conference. The word "ordination" had been permitted to stand thus qualified because the attention of the Church had been taken up with urgent matters, and because, as the report of the committee in 1856 shows, the ritual had not been looked upon as the exponent of the doctrines of the Church.

Since the action of the General Conference of 1864, consecration and not ordination is the proper and legal title of the service for setting apart bishops. Churches which hold that their bishops have a higher order as well as office use both "ordination" and "consecration," but the Methodist Episcopal Church, holding that bishops have no higher order than other presbyters, but that they have a higher office, uses the word "consecrate" in the sense that Wesley used the phrase "set apart" for official duty.

In 1866 Dr. Abel Stevens issued his book entitled *The Centenary of American Methodism*. In it, when

referring to the polity of the Methodist Episcopal Church, he says :

Its own system is essentially presbyterian, a presbyterian episcopacy. Its bishop is a presbyter in "order," though a bishop in office; a presbyter superintending the body of presbyters, *primus inter pares*—first among equals.

The Rev. James Mitchell, D.D., in his *Life of Bishop Levi Scott*, says of the bishop :

He had no respect for this hankering of a few after the faded tinsel of sacramentarianism, but clung to the theory of a strong executive board of supervision for the Church, the whole thought of which he expressed in one word, through his wonderful power of condensation, at a session of the Indiana Conference held in New Albany in the fall of 1871. On rising to read the appointments, he said among a few other things, "Brother presbyters, I arise as a presbyter-bishop to give you your work for a year." That was the whole of it—theory, executive duty and ability.*

The Rev. James Porter, D.D., issued his *History of Methodism* in 1876. In it, speaking of the bishops, he remarks, "They are *not higher in order*, and are *only officers*, as our Church claims," † and he speaks from an intimate acquaintance with the history and views of the Church, from a ministerial life of over half a century, and from a General Conference experience which began with his membership in the great Conference of 1844.

In 1876 Bishop Simpson's history, entitled *A Hundred Years of Methodism*, was issued. In it he says :

* Dr. Mitchell's *Life of Bishop Scott*, p. 52.

† Porter's *History of Methodism*, p. 414.

“The Methodist episcopacy is regarded as an *office* in the Church, not distinct in order from the eldership.”* Speaking of bishops he says: “They are simply executive or administrative officers.”

In 1878 the Rev. E. O. Haven, D.D., who was made a bishop about two years later, referred to the bishopric as an office, and said :

Men to perform this office need no undefined and indefinable halo, such as the unthinking may suppose to be connected with a fabulous apostolic succession. They are elders selected to perform a peculiar and responsible work.†

Thus throughout this period the authorities of the Church have held the doctrine of the parity of the orders of bishop and elder.

* Bishop Simpson's *Hundred Years of Methodism*, p. 228.

† *Methodist Quarterly Review*, 1878, p. 397.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF 1884.

NOW and then, during the first half of the century, it is possible that an isolated individual here and there in the Church may have carelessly used expressions not strictly in harmony with the teaching of the denomination in regard to its episcopacy, but these incorrect expressions had no force in changing the views of the Church.

In the General Conference of 1844 a few uttered sentiments "claiming for the Methodist episcopacy powers and prerogatives never advanced before" in the Church, and the Conference overwhelmed their advocates both by arguments and votes.

In later years a very few began to use the words order and office in a sense to which the Church had not been accustomed. Sometimes it was suggested that there was no difference between the word order and the word office, and finally, from the indefinite use of these words there was developed that which looked like a positive claim that the Church had three ministerial orders, and that the bishopric was a clerical order superior to and distinct from the eldership.

Possibly this was the result of a natural tendency

which had always existed, and which might assert itself at any time should the Church be off its guard, and especially, as in 1844, if some important point was to be gained. In a few instances it may have had its motive in a hankering after an ecclesiasticism which our Church has always rejected; but it is probable that generally these erroneous views sprang from incomplete knowledge of the history of the Church's polity. Certainly no one acquainted with the views of the Church, which we have cited, could truly affirm that the Church ever held any doctrine contrary to the parity of presbyters and bishops as to orders, but the authorities for the century had not then been collated, and much of the error grew out of lack of knowledge. Nevertheless the incorrect views were none the less dangerous.

In the General Conference of 1884 one of the ministerial delegates, in the course of a speech, used the High-Church expression, "Once a bishop always a bishop." This may have been unintentional, but whether intentional or unintentional it was not prudent to permit it to pass unchallenged, and to stand in the printed reports without the Conference putting something on record which would counteract its mischievous tendency.

The writer, being a member of that General Conference, therefore prepared, and at the earliest opportunity, namely, on the 15th of May, presented the following resolution :

Resolved, That we re-affirm the doctrine of the fathers of our Church, that the bishopric is not an order but an office, and that in orders a bishop is merely an elder or presbyter.*

After the author of the resolution had spoken at some length, a member moved to refer the resolution to the Committee on Episcopacy,† but the merits of the whole subject were quite fully discussed by at least a half a dozen speakers, a larger number than usually gained the floor on most questions. At last, after the previous question was ordered, the Conference rendered its decision. The first vote was not upon the resolution itself, but upon the motion to refer the resolution to a standing committee.

For such a body to refer such a question to a committee would be like the Senate of the United States sending a resolution affirming that it was the view of the fathers of the country that the presidency of the United States was an office and not an order of nobility, and that the president was a citizen like other citizens, to a committee to examine the school books and then report, so that the Senate might understand the facts and know how to vote. The Conference was familiar with the teaching of the Church, and did not need the assistance of a committee.

If the Conference had wanted to avoid the issue it would have agreed to the reference, but it was evident that the Conference had positive convictions

* General Conference Journal of 1884, p. 207.

† Debates in *Daily Christian Advocate*, 1884, p. 107.

and desired to make a deliverance upon the subject, and so the motion to refer was voted down by a heavy majority. Thus the body deliberately brought itself face to face with the main question, and then passed the resolution by an overwhelming vote.*

The eminent Dr. Daniel Curry, in advocating the passage of the resolution, declared that the erroneous opinion had appeared in various publications. He said :

I certainly have found it in print. Some of our ablest, brightest, recent discussions on the subject have assumed the contrary doctrines, at least by stating the case.†

The passage of the resolution was opposed by a few, because they claimed it was not necessary ; but no one denied that the resolution expressed the doctrine of the “ fathers ” and of the Church itself. On the contrary, every speaker admitted that to be the fact. Dr. Buckley said :

There is one thing settled in Methodism from the beginning until now, that our bishops are presbyters or elders. ‡

This General Conference was thoroughly competent to give an authoritative deliverance upon this question, and possibly more so than any future General Conference can be, for it contained members who had been prominent ministers of the Church for about a half a century, and had been members of General Conferences running back to 1844 or 1848,

* *Daily Christian Advocate*, 1884, pp. 105, 107.

† *Ibid.*, p. 107.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

besides many who had made the polity of the Church a life study. No future General Conference is likely to have so many members whose lives will run back so near to the "fathers" and the early discussions, and so, in that particular, future Conferences are not likely to be so well qualified.

The Conference saw the importance of checking the evil in its incipency, and so took this opportunity for formulating the doctrine of the Church.

In the debate on the resolution, the Rev. Dr. Curry and another delegate suggested that an "explanatory" "bracketed note" should be inserted "at the head of the form of consecration for bishops," stating "what is our view in this case that none of our people may be misled, or the great public." *

This suggestion was made on the 15th of May, during the progress of the discussion upon the resolution, and so had the effect of notice given at that date.

On the 21st of May Dr. Curry presented a resolution embodying such a note to be inserted in the Discipline.† According to the rule, it had to lie over, and it was printed in the *Daily Christian Advocate* of May 22. After standing in print a number of days, Dr. Curry called it up on the 26th of May. It was moved to lay it on the table, but the motion was voted down.‡

* *Daily Christian Advocate*, 1884, p. 107.

† *Ibid.*, p. 150.

‡ General Conference Journal, 1884, p. 267.

Then some one raised the point of order that it could not be considered without a suspension of the rules. This point was denied, but in order to settle all doubts the Conference promptly passed a motion to suspend the rules, and, after discussion, the Conference, with only a few votes in opposition, passed the resolution,* as follows:

Resolved, That these words be inserted as a rubric at the beginning of the ritual for the consecration of bishops:

“ [This service is not to be understood as an ordination to a higher order in the Christian ministry, beyond and above that of elders or presbyters, but as a solemn and fitting consecration for the special and most sacred duties of superintendency in the Church.] ” †

Every thing in connection with the resolution and the disciplinary note shows that the Conference made these deliverances with great deliberation and determination. Twice did it decide essentially the same thing. The passage of the first resolution committed the Conference to the adoption of the explanatory note. The action on the latter was merely a second decision on the same matter. Indeed, the Conference may be said to have passed upon it at least five times: first, in refusing to refer the resolution to a committee; second, in passing the resolution; third, in voting down the motion to lay the explanatory note upon the table; fourth, in passing the motion

* *Daily Christian Advocate*, 1884, p. 197; General Conference Journal, 1884, p. 267.

† *Atkinson's Centennial History of American Methodism*, p. 107.

to suspend the rules in order to consider the explanatory note; and fifth, the adoption of the note; and all this covered a period running from the 15th to the 26th of May; thus giving abundant time for reflection.

There was another expression of view which should be noted. During the month the General Conference was in session the Rev. Alfred Wheeler, D.D., as chairman of a committee appointed by the General Conference of 1880* to convey the fraternal greetings of the General Conference to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, sent a communication to that body in which occurs the following paragraph:

You have no prelates; we have none. Of prelacy you have nothing; neither have we. You have your *presbuteros episkopos*; so have we. We have our *episkopos presbuteros*; so have you. Here we are at one again, as well as in those fundamental doctrines to which we have before referred. And we propose to continue with you our protest against encumbering the Church with ministerial orders not known to the apostles and their times.†

We have traced the doctrine as to the Methodist episcopate from the time it matured in the mind of Rev. John Wesley and took form in the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Throughout the century from 1784 to 1884 there was no

* General Conference Journal, 1880, p. 394.

† This letter was read in the Presbyterian General Assembly on the 26th of May, 1884.

break in the continuity of opinion as expressed by the Church in various ways, and now, at the opening of a new century, the General Conference of 1884 rendered its decision as to the nature of the episcopate of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and re-affirmed the doctrine of the founders of the denomination. The deliverance of the General Conference of 1884 is in harmony with the doctrine held in 1784, and which has prevailed throughout the hundred years. The bishopric is an office, and the bishops are presbyters.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

THE Methodist Episcopal Church has always recognized that there is an *ordo ecclesiasticus*, and that there are official positions which are not clerical orders, though they are filled by those who have such orders. Thus it has its order of elders and its office of presiding elders; the presiding eldership being not an order, but an office of supervision filled by one who in orders is an elder. So it has held that the bishopric is a higher office of supervision occupied by one who also is an elder, and this view is sustained by the consensus of a century, as gathered from the expressed opinions of leading exponents of Methodism, from official declarations, and from the formal actions of authoritative Conferences.

Some persons have claimed that a Church has power to make as many orders as it pleases, and, reasoning from this assumption, have alleged that the Methodist Episcopal Church has made three orders, but this is a *non sequitur*. Even if a body had power to do a thing, it does not follow that it has exerted that power. So in this case the inference alluded to is illogical. Even if it be admitted that a Church had power to make as many orders as it pleased, this de-

termines nothing. The question remains one of historic fact. What did it do? How many orders did it make? Such questions compel us to investigate the records of history, and to inquire into present facts, if we would learn the truth. Hence we consult the teachings of the past and the facts of the present.

As a matter of fact the Methodist Episcopal Church at its organization recognized two orders, namely, the order of elders and the order of deacons, and it has never made any others. However, though the Methodist Episcopal Church has always had the diaconate and the presbyterate, it has never held that these two orders are absolutely necessary, or that it is necessary to have two ordinations for a valid ministry. Hence, though it has preferred to have the sub-order of the diaconate, and has two ordinations for those who come up into the ministry from the ranks of its laity, it concedes perfect liberty to other Churches to have the diaconate in some other form or to omit it entirely and to have only one clerical order, and, hence, it has recognized as a valid ministry that of Churches where the full ministry is conferred in one ordination, and has frequently received into its own ministry, without re-ordination, those who came from other denominations where the full ministerial function was granted in a single ordination. It has treated its diaconate as a stage in the progress toward the presbyterate, or, in other words, as a station in the way, or a point in the period of probation, leading

toward the full ministry, rather than something that is absolutely necessary for a true ministry.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church the full ministry is vested in the presbyter. It recognizes no ministerial function which does not inhere in the order of presbyters, and it has always denied the right to have any order above that possessed by presbyters.

With it the episcopacy has no higher clerical function, but is an executive expedient—a judicious arrangement, it has held, yet merely an expedient—which it uses as a convenience, and which it could modify to suit changing conditions, or even abandon entirely, and yet have a complete and valid Church.

Mr. Wesley held that Church government might be that of the independent congregation, that under a presbytery, or that under episcopal supervision. He preferred the latter, but recognized the validity of the others. So the Methodist Episcopal Church holds that there may be a legitimate Church with or without that which is commonly called the episcopal form of government, and on this ground it recognizes the validity of those Churches which are without a general or a diocesan supervision.

Examination shows that the episcopate of the Methodist Episcopal Church has not a single element of a clerical order as distinct from, and superior to, that of the presbyters. In this Church, and in general ecclesiastical usage, clerical orders relate to the sacraments, and each clerical order has its own pecul-

iar relation to one or all the sacraments. Hence Churches that hold their episcopacy to be a higher order concede as peculiarly belonging to its so-called episcopal order something of the supposed nature of a sacrament. Thus the Roman Catholic and Greek Churches consider confirmation and ordination to be sacraments, and these they conceive as belonging exclusively to the bishops, and so they hold their episcopacy to be an order superior to the eldership.

The articles of religion of the Anglican Church do not teach that confirmation is a sacrament, or that ordination is a sacrament, and so, when these articles were formulated, after the Protestant Reformation in England, the English Church did not hold that bishops had a higher clerical order than that of priests or presbyters, but that they were superior in office. When, however, the High-Church element gained strength, this school of thought gave to confirmation something of the nature of a sacrament, considering it, so to speak, as the completion of baptism, and, in the same manner, gave something of a sacramental character to the service of ordination. As these acts of confirmation and ordination, which High-Churchmen deemed to have a sacramental or quasi-sacramental character, were considered as belonging exclusively to the bishops, it was an easy thing for High-Churchmen to conceive that the bishops had a distinct and higher order, and to claim that non-episcopal ordinations were invalid.

This relation of orders to the sacraments is clearly seen in the orders of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It has an order of deacons, and the deacon has the right to baptize, and also to assist in the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It has the order of presbyters, and the presbyter has power, not only to baptize and to assist another elder in the communion, but he may also have full charge of the administration of the Lord's Supper. He has higher power as to the sacraments than that possessed by the deacon, and he has a higher clerical order.

On the same principle, if the episcopate is a higher order it will have its special sacrament, or its peculiar prerogative as to some sacrament; but the Methodist Episcopal Church has no sacrament other than those of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and, as to these, a presbyter has full control. Therefore, as a bishop has no greater power as to the sacraments than that of a mere presbyter, he has no higher order than a presbyter.

It is true that the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church are charged with important duties in relation to the ordination of ministers, but ordination is not a sacrament. But even if it were this would not be sufficient to make a distinct order, for the right to ordain does not inhere exclusively in the officers called bishops, but in the presbyters.

It has been a cardinal principle of the Methodist Episcopal Church from the beginning that "bishops

and presbyters are the same order and have the same right to ordain," and, hence, the bishops take a chief part in the work of ordaining, not because it exclusively inheres in them, but because the presbyters, in General Conference assembled, delegated that power to the office. And so, in 1828, Dr. Bond said: "The very circumstance of our having acknowledged the *right* of elders to ordain" was proof that the bishops had no "distinct ministerial order, contradistinguished from, and superior to, presbyters or elders."

This is further seen in the fact that the statute law of the Church provides that,

If by death, or otherwise, there be no bishop remaining in our Church the General Conference shall elect a bishop, and the elders, or any three of them, who shall be appointed by the General Conference for that purpose, shall consecrate him according to the ritual.*

This law is a constant reminder that the fountain of ordination is in the presbyters, and an action in compliance with this provision is a re-assertion of the original and inherent rights of the presbyters.

Further, this delegation of the duty of ordination in any sense to the bishops is merely an economic regulation for the sake of convenience and efficiency, and is not a concession to the episcopate that ordination is its inherent and exclusive right. That it is not such an acknowledgment of episcopal prerogative is seen in the fact that in the matter of ordination the bishop has no discretionary power. He cannot

* Discipline.

say whom he will or whom he will not ordain. The Conference designates the persons, and the bishop, as the legal agent of the Church, is bound to perform the service.

Again, as a matter of fact and of law, no bishop does by himself ordain any elder or consecrate any bishop. It is not his exclusive province. Other elders who are not superintendents always participate, and the bishop is merely one of a number of presbyters who represent the Church in this act of ordaining. They are presbyters; he is the chief or presiding presbyter, and this associated act is a perpetual assertion of the fact that the ordination is not episcopal, but presbyterial.

So-called third order episcopates have certain conceded inherent powers, but the episcopate of the Methodist Episcopal Church has no inherent prerogatives. All the powers it possesses are delegated powers, which may be added to or taken from as the Church may desire. Hence, in this particular, it lacks the quality of the so called higher order episcopacy. As Bishop Hamline showed, in 1844, the powers which the bishops possess were imparted to the bishops by the General Conference. He said :

The General Conference clothes them with these powers; and can the Conference convey what it does not possess? Can it impart to bishops what was not inherent in itself up to the time of conveying it? The Conference has these powers. Every thing conveyed as a prerogative to bishops, presiding elders, preachers, etc., by statutory provision, and not by the

constitution or in the restrictive rules, was in the General Conference, or it was mockery thus to grant it, and the tenure of these officers is void and their *seizin* tortious.*

He also showed that the General Conference had the right to resume what it gave; for example, to recall the power "to appoint a preacher to a field of labor," and to "make these regulations without a bishop and leave him a less onerous superintendence.†

On this principle the bishops, if the Church desired, might be relieved of the work of ordination, and this duty might be placed on other presbyters. Without this work they could continue to have the executive duty of superintendence, and so would be true bishops. It appears, therefore, that even ordination is not absolutely essential to the existence of the bishopric, though it may be deemed proper that the bishops have the chief part in that solemn service.

There is a peculiar permanence about a clerical order that does not pertain to an office. Thus one may resign an ecclesiastical office without losing his clerical character, but if he resigns his order he ceases to be a minister altogether. Thus a presbyter who gives up his order ceases to be a minister, but a presiding elder may resign or relinquish his official position as a presiding elder and yet retain his presbyter's order. This illustrates one of the distinctions between an office and an order.

Again, Churches that claim to have a higher order

* Debates of General Conference of 1844, p. 131.

† *Ibid.*

episcopacy hold the doctrine "Once a bishop always a bishop," and so they permit a bishop to resign his jurisdiction without resigning his position as a bishop, because they conceive that to be an order. But when a Methodist Episcopal bishop resigns his official jurisdiction he resigns every thing the bishopric gave him.

Because of the peculiar permanence of tenure which belongs to a clerical order it is more difficult to remove a minister from an order than it is from an office. Hence a minister cannot have his order taken from him without formal charges, formal trial, and formal conviction for a very serious offense, but the Church has held that the same peculiar difficulty does not exist in relation to an officer.

The action of the General Conference in the cases of Bishop Coke and Bishop Andrew was based on the ground that it was dealing with an office, and so it asserted its power to suspend or depose a bishop for less than crime, and that without the formalities which would have been necessary to divest a minister of his order; and Bishop Harris, in his work on *The Constitutional Powers of the General Conference*, says that the General Conference of 1844 applied the "elementary doctrines of Methodist jurisprudence" and "expounded the law in its general principles" "most plainly and fully." *

Again, there is nothing that bishops do that mere presbyters may not do under certain circumstances.

* Bishop Harris on *Powers of General Conference*, pp. 149, 150.

For example, it is the duty of a bishop to preside in the Annual Conferences, but in the absence of the bishop an ordinary elder may preside; and so the law provides that if there is no bishop the supervisory work of the bishops shall be done by elders.

Should a bishop be accused of imprudent conduct he is to be admonished by elders, and when he is tried it is to be by presbyters. These facts are assertions that presbyters are the peers of bishops as to order, for a man is to be tried by his peers.

In the services for setting apart deacons, elders, and bishops, the distinction which exists between them is brought out by the use of the word order in the form for the ordination of deacons and the form for the ordination of elders, while in the service for the consecration of elected elders to the episcopal office the word order is not used.

The lesson used in the consecration of bishops is Acts xx, 17-35, which mentions Paul's calling "the elders of the Church," whom he addresses as "overseers" or bishops. The service speaks of the one to be consecrated as "the elected person." Thus, "The elected person shall be presented by two elders," and "The bishop and elders present shall lay their hands upon the head of the elected person." The service also declares that God has "appointed divers offices" in the Church, and speaks of the bishopric as an "office."

It is true that there is a peculiar sense in which

the presbyterate and diaconate may be spoken of as offices, but it is in a different sense from the use of the word office in reference to the episcopate, just as an ordinary presbyter has not an office in the same sense that a presiding elder has an official position.

We must be careful not to be confused by the double sense in which the word office may be used, for it has various applications. Thus it may be applied to "The service appointed for a particular occasion; as, the office of the mass; the office for the burial of the dead." * It may be used in reference to a position occupied by one who is an officer. And, again, it may be used in the sense of a duty or work to be performed.† We must not be misled by the double or triple sense in which the word may be used, but must distinguish between these uses.

The deacon and the presbyter have an office in the sense of duty to be discharged, which office or duty is involved in the order of deacon or elder; but the bishop has an office in the sense of being an officer filling an official position. Thus a number of presbyters may meet and elect one of their order president, and, as president, this presbyter holds an office in a very different sense from that in which all may be said to have the office of presbyter. They are all of the same order, and the president is their superior merely as their presiding officer. So Pope says:

* Webster.

† Lat. *officium*, from *ob* and *facere*, to make or do.

“There is no office of eldership as such, but there is, of course, an ἐπισκοπή,” * or office of a bishop.

The Church all along its history has admitted the distinction which exists between the words order and office. Words mean something, and have a living power, and an intelligent Church will not accept a new ecclesiastical term without clearly understanding its meaning and intention ; neither will it abandon an old word without good cause, any more than it will permit an old word to be used in a new, misleading, and false sense. Having recognized this distinction between order and office, the Methodist Episcopal Church cannot permit the distinction to be destroyed without great damage in many directions.

It cannot permit its episcopal office to be called an order, even in a modified sense, for the modification would soon be forgotten, and the High-Church word would soon bring all that is implied in the High-Church idea.

There are various practical reasons why it is important to hold that the bishopric is not a distinct and superior order. To hold that the bishopric is a distinct and superior order would be not only to shift from the old and well-established doctrines of the Church, but also to incur many ecclesiastical dangers.

Thus it would carry with it the danger of prelacy. Prelacy is “the government of the Church by bishops,” and all Churches which have a higher order

* Pope's *Systematic Theology*, vol. iii, p. 343.

episcopacy have a prelatical government; for in such Churches the government is entirely or largely in the hands of the prelates. Even in the most moderate form there is a house of bishops with concurrent legislative powers as well as powers of supervision, and hence no law can be enacted that the higher order bishops do not permit. The Methodist Episcopal Church, however, is not a government *by* bishops, but a government *with* bishops. The Church governs, in some particulars, with bishops, as its agents, in the interim of the General Conferences, but the bishops are responsible to the General Conference. Hence, while the bishops are superintendents, they have no legislative functions, either as a body or as individuals. While they are subject to the General Conference, they are not members of that body, and, though they are the presiding officers, they have no voice or vote in its deliberations,* or in the deliberations of an Annual Conference. If it were once admitted that the bishops had a higher clerical order, then the tendency would be to overturn the present law and usage, and instead of a government *with* bishops, to establish a government *by* bishops, which would be prelacy. The prelatical word would be the entering wedge of the thing it represents. The ten-

* This was re-asserted in the General Conference of 1884, when the Conference denied the *right* of a bishop to represent a committee, though it proffered him the privilege.—*Daily Christian Advocate* for 1884, p. 179.

dency would be to isolate the bishops from the elders, and make them a separate house with concurrent legislative and veto power, so that no law could be enacted that they did not approve.

The aim of Methodism has been to go back to the simplicity of New Testament times. Its episcopacy, therefore, is not of the High-Church order, but of the type of the primitive Christian Church, and hence it is not open to the attacks which may be made upon the episcopacy of some other Churches.

The early Christian Church began with a simple episcopate, which in the course of years gradually became intricate, erroneous, and corrupt; the Church of England, at the Reformation, started with a purer view of the episcopate, but gradually passed to higher order views and consequent exclusiveness; John Wesley started with the High-Church views which in his day prevailed in the Anglican Church, and gradually modified these opinions, and at last accepted the view of the episcopate that prevailed in the early Christian Church. Methodism received these Low-Church views, and has retained them ever since, and one mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church is to maintain the simple and liberal ideas of ecclesiastical government which are in harmony with the teachings of the New Testament and the practice of the uncorrupted Christian Church.

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